

2007

# Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities / by Shimei Zang.

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**CHINESE STUDENTS' LATER-YEAR EXPERIENCES IN CANADIAN  
UNIVERSITIES**

by  
Shimei Zang

A thesis submitted to  
Lakehead University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Education

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY  
THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO**

January 2007

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*ISBN: 978-0-494-31874-4*

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*ISBN: 978-0-494-31874-4*

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## **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Korteweg, my supervisor, for her impressive guidance, expertise, insightful suggestions, patience, encouragement and passion. If it was not for you, my research journey would not have been so rewarding. For the giving of your time to read my drafts, offering suggestions, even during holidays, Lisa, I cannot express how grateful I am to you.

I also owe my thanks to Dr. Seth Agbo, my committee member, for his great confidence in my ability to do the research well and the attention to detail to make this study more professional. I also want to thank Dr. John O'Meara, my internal examiner, for his support, valuable comments and helpful advice.

I want to acknowledge and appreciate the twelve participants who shared their perceptions and experiences of being a student in Canadian universities. Without their commitment and efforts, there would not be this thesis.

Lastly, I want to thank my parents (Zang Yi and Lv Hong), my sisters (Zang Shizhu, Zang Shisong, and Zang Lan) for their love and help to take care of my son in China while I have been studying in Canada. Finally, I acknowledge the love and support of my husband, Wang Zhongsheng, who always understands me best and consistently does his best to help me achieve my dreams. I cannot help but thank my son, Xihang, because he is one of my biggest motivations to go on with this thesis journey.

## **Abstract**

The mosaic of Canadian university campuses is changing to reflect the presence of more and more minority students, including both Chinese international and immigrant students. This qualitative study explored what Chinese students have experienced in their later-year Canadian university studies and how their Canadian educational experiences have made an impact on them. Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (1) perspectives from a later-year point of view; (2) expectations and outcomes; (3) students' perceived contributions to Canadian higher education and society; and lastly, (4) their suggestions for Canadian professors, future Chinese students, and university staff. One significant finding of the students' accounts was that participants' later-year academic experience was even more stressful than the first year. The reasons included the pedagogical contrast between the Asian and Canadian educators; the demand for higher levels of independent thinking abilities and self-motivation to learn; and other career related worries upon graduation. Another original finding from this study was that the participants attributed their hardships in adjusting to Western university pedagogies to a lack of exposure to, and familiarity with Canadian university teaching and learning pedagogies rather than an inability to adjust their learning.

It is worth noting that all twelve participants agreed that they began to know more about Canadian society and Canadians, and became more integrated into Canadian culture from the second year on. The finding from this study demonstrates that through more contact with the host culture in their later-year stage of studies, most participants forge a more integrated relationship with the host culture.

Chinese student-participants in this study achieved more than they expected from their

Canadian university education. They not only obtained their desired higher education degree, recognized by North American universities, the majority of the student-participants tended to view their Canadian university experience as a precious opportunity to enhance their independent thinking abilities, confidence, and self-awareness, which helped broaden their future outlooks and better guide their future decisions. All the participants stated that their experiences in the Canadian university transformed their life in a significant way.

Given the participants' accounts of their Canadian university learning experiences, implications for Canadian universities, educators, and administrators are included in the study, in the hope that they will help inform universities' future decisions about facilitating programs, teaching, and administrative services to provide more effective and competitive Canadian higher education.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	i
Abstract.....	ii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of the Study.....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Rationale of the Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	8
Significance of the Study.....	8
Limitations.....	9
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Transitional Experiences.....	11
Descriptions of students' adjustment .....	11
Factors influencing students' adjustment.....	13
The processes of students' adjustment.....	14
Coping strategies.....	15
Academic Issues.....	16
Characteristics of Western teaching and learning.....	16
The social-cultural perspective.....	17
Factors influencing students' academic performance.....	18
Issues of Mental Health.....	20
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Personal and Cultural Introduction.....	23
Research Design.....	24
Setting.....	24
Sample.....	25
Research Process.....	27
Selection of Participants .....	27
Data collection procedures.....	27
Data analysis procedures.....	28
Ethical Issues.....	29
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Introduction.....	31
Major Themes of the Study.....	31
Theme 1: Perspectives from a later-year point of view.....	31
Academic issues: More challenging.....	31
Financial issues.....	37
Cultural issues.....	39
Relationship issues: Stepping beyond the Chinese social circle.....	41
Theme 2: Expectations and outcomes.....	45
Expectation A: Obtaining a North-American degree for future career prosperity.....	45
Expectation B: A desire for change or personal improvement.....	47
Expectation C: Searching for clearer life direction.....	48

Outcome A: Improvement of independent thinking abilities...	49
Outcome B: Unmet language and cultural competencies.....	53
Outcome C: Gains of self-confidence.....	54
Outcome D: Multi-perspectives and worldviews.....	56
Outcome E: Greater expectations.....	58
Theme 3: Perceived contributions to Canadian universities, society, and China.....	59
Theme 4: Suggestions for professors, future Chinese students, and the university Staff.....	61
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION, CONCLUSIONS,                   AND IMPLICATIONS.....</b>	<b>65</b>
Introduction.....	65
Overview of the Study.....	65
Interpretations of the Findings.....	66
Academic shock.....	66
The time influence on academic stress.....	67
From null culture shock to better integration.....	68
Canadian education's impacts on Chinese students.....	71
Differences between the two groups' experiences.....	73
Differences between the Big and Small University Settings.....	76
Conclusions.....	76
Implications of the Study.....	77
Implications for university administration.....	78
Implications for professors and/or instructors.....	80
Implications for Canadian society.....	83
Suggestions for Further Research.....	84
<b>References.....</b>	<b>85</b>
Appendix A	
<b>Interview Guide.....</b>	<b>91</b>
Appendix B (for participants from the small university)	
<b>Cover Letter.....</b>	<b>93</b>
Appendix C (for participants from the larger universities)	
<b>Cover Letter .....</b>	<b>94</b>
Appendix D (for participants from the small university)	
<b>Consent Form.....</b>	<b>95</b>
Appendix E (for participants from the large universities)	
<b>Consent Form.....</b>	<b>96</b>



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Canada, well known as a multiethnic and multicultural country, attracts people from diverse backgrounds to achieve their various dreams. For students, the motivation is to obtain well qualified, globally recognized, higher education. While many studies concerning foreign students focus on adjustment issues to the host country's academy and culture (Jones, 2005; Liang, 2004; Ridley, 2004; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2003; Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994), this study focuses on the experiences of Chinese students in their later-year<sup>1</sup> studies and how these experiences impact them as a result of a full cycle immersion in Canadian universities.

According to Statistics Canada (2005), 70,000 international students were enrolled in Canadian university programs in 2003/04, an increase of 16.8% from the previous year's total. Almost five out of every ten international students arrive from Asia with 44% of them originating from China. In current Chinese society, studying abroad as Chinese international students<sup>2</sup> has become a prevalent phenomenon. Due to the effects of globalization, Chinese people now have more opportunities to communicate and collaborate with Westerners. The contemporary commonplace Chinese position is that the more knowledge and experience one has with Westerners, the greater the academic and career opportunities one will obtain in either China or a Western country.

Among Western countries, Canada is considered a profitable option by many Chinese parents and students. Three basic reasons account for Canada's reputation of achieving this favourable international preference. Firstly, like other Western countries, Canadian education, especially higher education, has a strong reputation as more advanced, more creative, and more

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<sup>1</sup> The term later-year in this study refers to any period of study after a full year of continuous immersion/residency in a Canadian university.

<sup>2</sup> I am using the term, Chinese international students, to describe those who come to Canada as visa students for post-secondary education with the original intention to return to China after the completion of their studies.

flexible than its Chinese counterpart. Secondly, with the increasing speed of economic development since the 1980s, most youth in Chinese society are growing up as the 'spoiled generation'. Parents try to satisfy all their children's material needs to the point that these children have no idea what hard work entails. Studying and living abroad is considered by Chinese parents a perfect antidote for their children to realize what hard work means. Living in a foreign country, these children have to learn to rely on themselves to achieve what they want. As a result, in the estimation of Chinese parents, these children are expected to become more independent, more capable, and more open minded through international studies ("Studying Abroad," 2005). Finally, when choosing their Western destination, parents and students prefer to choose a country that is internationally perceived to be more peaceful, open, and well developed. Based on these considerations, Canada exceeds other Western countries as the preferred educational destination.

Besides Chinese international students, another group who constitutes a sub-group of the Chinese student population in Canadian post-secondary institutions is Chinese immigrant students<sup>3</sup>. According to Statistics Canada (2003), there were a total of 1,029,400 individuals identifying themselves as Chinese in 2001, up from 860,100 in 1996. The Chinese accounted for 3.5% of the total national population and 26% of the visible minority of the Canadian population. With the increasing number of Chinese immigrants in Canada, the number of Chinese immigrants choosing to go to Canadian universities to continue their education or achieve higher certification in a Canadian post-secondary institution has also increased.

An examination of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Chinese immigrants is necessary to understand their decision to attend Canadian universities. During the past two decades, most Chinese immigrants have arrived from three locations: Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. During the mid-1980s and early 1990s, there was a huge influx

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<sup>3</sup> I am using the term, Chinese immigrant students, to connote those who were born and raised in China, but who have come to Canada as permanent skilled immigrants for living or for higher education reasons.

of Hong Kong immigrants to Canada due to the fear of the return of sovereignty to mainland China. However, in recent decades of Canadian immigration, the mainland Chinese have over-taken the number of people from Hong Kong and Taiwan as the largest source of Chinese immigration into Canada (Chui, Tran, & Flanders, 2005). The Canadian government grants entrance to immigrants who apply as skilled workers based on criteria such as age, education level, occupational experiences and personal financial resources. More than half of recent Chinese skilled worker immigrants, aged 25 to 54 years old, hold at least a university degree and have mature professional experiences. Chui, Tran and Flanders (2005) reported that “nearly one-third (31%) of Chinese immigrants...had a university education, almost double the rate of 18% among the general population” (p. 28).

With all these qualifications, Chinese immigrants are expected to adapt successfully into Canadian society; however, recent Chinese immigrants have experienced difficulties in the Canadian labour market (Chiswick, Cohen & Zach, 1997). According to the 2001 Census, prime working-age Chinese who immigrated in the 1990s had an employment rate of 61%; significantly lower than the 80% for the total Canadian population (as cited in Chui, Tran & Flanders, 2005). Chiswick, Cohen and Zach (1997) conclude that recent immigrants are characterized by an increasing number of mainland Chinese with higher educational qualifications and better English proficiency, yet they still experience lower employment rates.

The new highly skilled immigrants from China belong to the elite or at least the middle-class of Chinese society and enjoy affluent and socially respected status in China. Contrastingly, while in Canada, many of them turn out to be low-income individuals, engaged in low-skilled work and undergoing great pressures from physical, social, cultural, and psychological challenges (Berry, Kim, Minder, & Mok, 1985). The reasons for this outcome vary according to each individual, but one of the main reasons is that Canadian employers do not recognize foreign educational credentials and work experiences (Man, 2004; Tran, 2004).

Man (2004) argues that new immigrants are less likely to fully participate and succeed in the economy and society due to the following barriers: a lack of Canadian work experience; language efficiency; and non-recognition of their original credentials and qualifications. Similarly, Tran (2004) posits that foreign-born visible minorities meet greater challenges due to a lack of official language fluency, relevant Canadian work experiences, and a discounting by employers of their previous educational credentials and working experiences. As was reported by Statistics Canada (2004), about 48% of men and 61% of women from Southeast Asia held at least a university degree in 2001 from their birth country, but they worked in Canadian occupations requiring, at most, a high school education.

Investment in a Canadian university education seems to be an economic remedial resort for Chinese immigrants to compensate for employment problems and to cope with the challenges of rapid knowledge-based growth. Moreover, Chinese people have inherited a cultural tradition that places high value on education for self-improvement and upward social mobility. Rather than directing their efforts in vain in a biased workforce, many Chinese immigrants prefer to pursue post-secondary education in order to update their professional knowledge and training in a Canadian context. They are driven by the hope that this pursuit of a Canadian education will work to enhance their currently diminished economic and social status. Foreign students have long expressed difficulties adapting to different educational systems and values (Marin, 1996) and this long-standing adjustment is no different for Chinese students. It is not an easy task for Chinese international or immigrant students to study at Western universities for the following reasons. Firstly, there is a heavy financial burden. According to Statistics Canada (2006), the average tuition fees for undergraduate international students are over three times the rate that Canadian students pay. Furthermore, there is a substantial difference between the value of Chinese money and that of Canadian money. Many Chinese parents spend almost all of their savings to pay for their children's tuition and other

living and traveling costs, ensuring that their children have a more promising economic future. For immigrant students, although the tuition is the same as local Canadian-born students, they often have more family burdens and expenses to bear, considering that they are often old enough to be parents and the primary breadwinners. For most Chinese students, whether immigrant or international, they have had to spend a significant amount of time carefully considering and pondering whether the investment in a Canadian university education is worthwhile.

Secondly, in traditional Chinese culture, family life is an important value where individuals are always connected to and dependent upon their family units (Slote, 1998). However, studying abroad as an international student means being far away from family members and friends, which causes loneliness and social hardship for both sides of the separation. The international student's situation is not that different for immigrant students when the choice of a Canadian post-secondary education may also result in physical separation from family members.

Thirdly, it is a great challenge for Chinese students to move to a completely different non-Asian environment because of the many differences between the two educational systems, Chinese and Canadian, being based on different values, norms, language systems, and social customs (Marin, 1996). As mentioned above, most Chinese international students usually grow up in higher socio-economic families where they have been more indulged and, consequently, less socially vulnerable compared to other Chinese students with common or low economic backgrounds. As a result, studying abroad is a great social challenge for these international students. For immigrant students, besides general language problems and cultural differences, they have family responsibilities to take care of due to their age (old enough to be parents), as well as the pressure of being the financial earner for the extended family during their period of studies.

In summary, the Canadian university experience for most Chinese students is characterized by a journey full of hope, expectations, excitement, difficulties, and challenges. By studying at Canadian universities, will these students achieve their goals such as becoming confident of prospering socially and economically in the future? What experiences are these students encountering? Will the experiences conform to what these students have expected? Or, on the contrary, significantly change their original expectations? Curious about all these questions, I was motivated to conduct this study on Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities, because first-hand accounts and descriptions by Chinese students could help future students, educators, administrators, and policy-makers make better informed decisions for future students and programs.

#### Purpose of the Study

The first purpose of this study is to provide a vivid and clear account of Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities. I have decided to focus on their later-year experiences because it was the point at which Chinese students were best able to reflect maturely and comprehensively upon their Canadian immersion cycle of study. The second purpose of this thesis is to discover from the participants' perspectives whether their investments in Canadian higher education were considered to be worth the costs in terms of academic, cultural, and social gains. The third purpose of this study is to describe what contributions these Chinese students have made to the progress and development of Canadian post-secondary education and Canadian multicultural society. The study also aims to provide some insights for post-secondary educators, administrators, and policy makers to help inform their future decisions about teaching, administrating, and facilitating programs for international and immigrant students.

#### Rationale of the Study

It is commonly believed that students work hard for a promising future. This is

particularly the case for Chinese international and immigrant students enrolled in Canadian higher education institutions. For these students, it is not only a money-consuming task, but also a task laden with family honour. In China, it is a commonly held belief that children's achievements, especially adult children, will bring honour and reputation to their families and even to their families' ancestors<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, due to the one-child birth-control policy in China, every child now bears the weight of more expectations from their family than any other generation. For Chinese students who study in western countries, the expectations for achievement are even greater, based on the amount of money and time that have been invested by their families. It is important to know what these students are experiencing, perceiving and gaining in Canadian universities and whether they are satisfied with the results.

On the other hand, multiculturalism is a national policy in Canada that informs its laws and educational institutions. Whether minority students, such as Chinese students, can benefit Canadian higher-education is a question that still needs to be addressed. By examining Chinese international and immigrant students' experiences in different Canadian universities, this study reflects a broader picture of experiences and perceptions of Canadian post-secondary education that will inform Canadian educators, administrators, and policy-makers. Another justification for this study is the lack of educational research focusing on minority university students' later-year experiences. Most studies focus on the transitional experiences of the first-year, or they provide a general description of educational conditions in the host country. This study can be distinguished from other studies by its focus on Chinese students' experiences during their later years and their reflections upon the continuum of social, cultural and intellectual changes through their Canadian education experience.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Confucian philosophy, it is extremely important for children to show complete filial piety to their families. One way for children to achieve this in modern society is to obtain academic success to honour their families.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to explore what twelve international and immigrant students, all originating from Mainland China, have experienced in their later-year Canadian university studies and how Canadian educational experiences have impacted them. It also aims to discover what contributions Chinese students perceive to have made to the development of Canadian higher education, multicultural community, and, upon return by the international students, to Chinese society. More specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions.

1. What are Chinese students' perceptions of their later-year experiences in Canadian universities for the completion of a degree?

1a. What are Chinese students' perceptions of the most acute changes they went through during their cycle of immersion in Canadian higher education?

2. How do Chinese students evaluate their Canadian educational experiences?

2a. How can Canadian higher education and society benefit more from these Chinese students and how can Canadian universities better serve the unique needs of this growing student population?

2b. What contributions and benefits do the international students believe they will be able to provide to China's economy and society upon their re-entry?

## Significance of the Study

The study presents a detailed account of Chinese students' perceptions of their educational pursuits in Canadian universities and provides references and insights for future studies concerning Chinese students in Canadian universities. By understanding how Chinese



students view and evaluate their post-secondary experiences in Canadian universities, administrators and policy makers will be able to consider more effective instructional, programmatic and administrative services for these minority students. Within a more supportive and effective educational environment, minority students and university staff will be able to enact a more advanced and culturally inclusive Canadian higher education system. With a greater number of qualified diverse students in Canada whose civic sensibilities are cultivated through Canadian higher education, Canada's own sustained development of a harmoniously multicultural society will be better ensured.

#### Limitations

Due to the small sample size of this study (N=12), generalization of these research results to the majority of Chinese students in Canada are limited; however, some of the findings may be transferable in a limited way, or at the very least, will offer directions and parameters for future studies with a similar topic.

As a Chinese immigrant student myself, my language and cultural abilities have helped me to better understand Chinese students' experiences. But these same abilities, as well as an embodied sense of empathy, may have also influenced me to over-emphasize and express the findings in a more accentuated personalized manner as my own educational experiences are implicated. The dilemma I face is my proximity to the topic in my own lived experiences while I am also conscious of my research responsibility to interpret the findings from an informed and broader perspective. Though I interpret my situated stance of researcher as insightful and an enhancement to achieving the study's goals, I leave the final reading and decision of this research stance with the discerning reader.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature concerning Chinese students' educational experiences in Canadian universities is limited; hence, the first need of this literature review is to expand its scope to a broader literature on international and immigrant students' educational pursuits in the West<sup>5</sup>. This educational literature can be organized into the three following themes of analysis: transitional experiences, academic issues, and issues of mental health.

### Transitional Experiences

Although local students may also experience transitional periods as the discourse of university academic disciplines can be different, confusing, and mysterious compared to prior studies, students from different cultural and language backgrounds may experience an even more intense transition (Ridley, 2004; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2003; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994). For example, in one study, it was found that Asian students had greater difficulty in adjusting to campus life than non-Asian mainstream students (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998). The topic of international students' transitional experiences includes four subsections in this review: descriptions of students' adjustments; factors influencing students' adjustment; the process of students' adjustments; and their coping strategies.

### *Descriptions of Students' Adjustment*

One pattern in the literature reveals that Chinese students must make more adjustments to different teaching and learning approaches than local-born mainstream students. Ngwainmbi (2004) investigated whether the western style of knowledge acquisition—the

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<sup>5</sup> In this study, most educational literature on this topic refers to or is set in the North American context.

student-centered method—can be applicable to a Chinese university setting. The findings reveal that Chinese students enjoyed the North American interactive learning style in their own university setting for lively topics such as sports and non-national topics (e.g. American foreign policy and Sino-American diplomatic relations). During these discussions, the Chinese students showed critical thinking abilities and were expressive; however, in the same study, Chinese students were reluctant to express their personal views on political issues when discussing Chinese policies. Hence, the study demonstrates that Chinese students adapt well to a student-centered pedagogy when discussing particular issues, usually popular and non-national or international issues.

In a study exploring the ways that Chinese students adapt to a western learning environment, Jones (2005) argues that Chinese students show similar conceptualizations of critical thinking as their non-Chinese classmates. The study further highlights the adaptability of international students to different educational environments and pedagogical approaches.

Chow (1998) compared the adaptation experiences of Hong Kong and Caribbean high school immigrant students and claims that Hong Kong students adapt better than Caribbean students in their academic performances. But from cultural, social, and linguistic perspectives, the findings are reversed, with the Caribbean high school students having greater success.

Six years later Liang (2004) cast doubt on the abilities of minority students' academic adaptations to certain learning activities. By exploring high school Chinese immigrant students' perceptions and interactions during cooperative learning activities in an ESL class, Liang (2004) finds that Chinese students have multiple and contradictory views of cooperative learning. The results demonstrate that students simultaneously liked and disliked

cooperative learning activities in English as a second language (ESL) classes. The dilemma seems to “be linked to the different cultural, socio-economic, and educational worlds in which these Chinese students lived before and reside now” (p. 655). Liang (2004) further explains that the conflicts in their thinking and actions on collectivism versus individualism, and cooperation versus competition are strengthened at the Canadian school, though they have already been experienced by these students in China.

Another emphasis in the literature focuses on students’ problems when adjusting to North American written discourses (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999). By analyzing data collected from interviews, observations, written samples, and participants’ journals, Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) suggest that international students need greater academic assistance, such as addressing the differences in academic writing conventions across different cultures.

Although there is a dearth of research dealing with the so-called reverse culture shock or the readjustment process encountered by international students when they return home, it remains an issue worth further investigation as it continues for many international students. Beijing University in China has created a series of new policies to lure overseas students back home, including offering more funding, more spacious housing, and better working conditions (Plafker 1995). In a longitudinal study of readjustment by Japanese adolescents who returned home to Japan from a one-year placement in various countries of the world, the results show that the returning students experienced emotional distress up to six months after their return from a foreign sojourn (Furukawa, 1997).

#### *Factors Influencing Students’ Adjustment*

A number of empirical studies have supported the claim that factors such as contact with

the host nationals, one's English language proficiency, strength of one's ethnic identity, and cross-cultural self-efficacy all play an important role in the student's better adjustment to the new Western country (Li & Gasser, 2005; Poyrazli, 2003; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Royrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, and Pisecco (2002) add that an assertive disposition and academic self-efficacy also contribute greatly to international students' general adjustment.

### *The Processes of Students' Adjustment*

Another theme throughout the adjustment research is that the phenomenon of adjustment is a dynamic and changing process (Volet & Renshaw, 1995; Ying, 2005; Scheyvens, Wild, & Overton, 2003). Volet and Renshaw (1995) conducted research on international students' ways of learning, goal setting, and perceptions of beneficial academic contexts in Australia. The findings reveal that at the beginning of their university studies, South-east Asian students showed differences compared to local Australian students on academic goals, but that these differences dissipated after one semester. On the other hand, both groups' overall patterns of academic change during their university enrolment were similar. To conclude, Volet and Renshaw (1995) argue that students' learning processes are strongly influenced by the specific characteristics of the university environment in which they were involved.

After conducting a two-year longitudinal study to investigate acculturative stressors experienced by Taiwanese students in the U.S., Ying (2005) found that academic challenges were regarded as the priority stressor for all these students compared to other factors, such as homesickness, cultural difference, social isolation, and unfamiliar climate. At the same time, the results show that these stressors declined significantly in effect after and during the first calendar year from the students' arrival.

Based on research conducted at Massey University, New Zealand, and after an extensive literature review, Scheyvens, Wild, and Overton (2003) discovered that international students face particular stressors and pressure during the first few months of adaptation to a new cultural, linguistic, and learning environment. The study posits that international female students, especially those who have families and dependents, face additional and continuing pressures.

One point worth noting here is that, although most of the studies demonstrate how critical the first few months or even the first year in a new country is for minority students, these studies do not address or describe the ongoing situation that these students experience after a more complete or longer cycle of study in the host Western country.

#### *Coping Strategies*

In the adjustment literature, there is also a focus on how international students cope with problems that emerge in the new university social environment, such as culture shock. After an exploratory investigation on the effects of a cultural orientation program for international students, McKinlay, Pattison and Gross (1996) claim that culture shock is a more complex phenomenon than expected and it is exacerbated by personal and social factors. Al-sharideh and Goe (1998) argue that establishing an ethnic community with persons from a similar cultural background or nationality is an effective way to solve problems caused by a lack of assimilation into the new culture, especially during the initial period.

Cemalcilar, Falbo and Stapleton (2005) conducted a web-survey with 280 first-year international students to investigate the roles of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies in international students' cross-cultural transition. Their findings suggest that

contacting home through the use of CMC had a positive impact on students' adaptation to the new Western culture. Contact with home via CMC lessened home-sickness with the results of a maintenance of home values, preservation of national identity, and a continual social support mechanism. Technologies helped the transition in two directions: maintaining strong connections with the home country and facilitating the acquisition of the new culture.

### Academic Issues

The second theme of the literature on minority students' educational paths concerns academic related issues, such as the characteristics of Western teaching and learning styles, the socio-cultural perspective, and the factors influencing students' academic performances.

#### *Characteristics of Western Teaching and Learning*

After reviewing the literature on learner-centered education, Henson (2003) contends that there are six characteristics embedded in a learner-centered education model. These characteristics include the following:

- (1) Education should be experienced-based, (2) each individual learner's own unique qualities and dispositions should be considered when planning experiences, (3) the learner's perceptions should shape the curriculum, (4) learner's curiosity should be fed and nurtured, (5) learning is best when it involves the emotions, and (6) the learning environment should be free from fear. (p. 14)

Henson (2003) calls upon educators' continuous commitment to improve their understanding of learner-centered education in order for the student-centered teaching approach to keep evolving rather than collapse into a static construct.

Brown (2003) argues that traditional, teacher-centered instructional approaches do not



work for the increasingly diverse student population on Western campuses. Brown (2003) calls for a transition to a learner-centered approach because it creates an environment where learners can co-construct their learning rather than rely solely on teachers and teacher authority. Teachers need to design flexible instruction on the basis of each learner's needs and characteristics, thus university education can be designed and implemented according to students' real needs.

### *The Socio-cultural Perspective*

Alfred (2002) asserts that the dominant theories used in understanding and promoting adult learning still focus on individual or a primarily cognitive perspective of learning, which privileges a Eurocentric worldview. With an increasingly diverse student population, especially more and more students with non-western backgrounds, Alfred (2002) calls for a shift to a socio-cultural theory of learning, arguing that socio-cultural theory holds more promise for informing a more inclusive education. For example, Alfred (2003) found that Caribbean Anglophone immigrant women's learning experiences in the host country were influenced by their early schooling socialization and culture of their home country. Alfred (2003) argues that to encourage immigrant students to participate more in collaborative learning, a positive learning environment, greater development of competencies in the host culture, and a well defined structure for the learning process in the classroom are necessary. Furthermore, Alfred (2003) argues that with a longer amount of time spent in the new culture, immigrant students feel more comfortable and participate more regularly in the collaborative work activities of a Caucasian dominated classroom.

Lee and Sheared (2002) argue that formal and informal socialization plays a significant

role in immigrant adult learners' educational experiences in the host country. Socialization is a dynamic process constructed by means of the students' own cultural norms, the new Western cultural models, and the two intertwined cultures' effects on immigrant students' learning within a formal educational setting. Lee and Sheared (2002) encourage educators to promote opportunities for students to bring their own social history into the classroom environment as a way to become more active in the classroom community.

In a socio-cultural case study in two elementary schools with culturally diverse students, Katz (1999) illustrates how school leaders and staff worked hard to create personal linkages between schools and students. Those linkages include establishing a caring environment, increasing parental involvement, reducing inter-ethnic conflict and tension, and providing a more harmonious environment for learning. The study sheds light on how schools can reform and restructure themselves to better serve all members of the school.

#### *Factors Influencing Students' Academic Performances*

Another focus in the literature is the factors that influence minority students' academic performances. Chow (2004) claims that Chinese-Canadian adolescents' school performances are influenced by factors of socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age, religion, and country of birth. Maintaining one's ethnic language and strong self-identification also have strong positive effects on school performance.

According to Fuligni (1997), besides demographic and psychosocial factors that influence students' academic performances, a more significant correlation with their academic achievement is a strong belief in the value of education shared by the students themselves, their parents, and their peers. Etcheverry, Clifton and Roberts (2001) argue that

students' perceptions of social capital resources, especially support derived from interactions with other students, have direct and indirect effects on students' academic self-concept and educational achievement.

Ogbu and Simon (1998) use cultural-ecological theory to explain minority students' school performance. This theory posits that the ways in which minority students are treated in a white-dominated educational system and, as a consequence of this treatment, the way that minority students perceive and respond to this schooling, play an important role in determining students' performance. Rather than classify minority students according to their race, Ogbu and Simon (1998) classify them into two groups: (a) voluntary minorities who are the immigrants that come to the U.S. according to their own willingness for better economic and social development; and (b) involuntary minorities who are Americans as a result of slavery, conquest or colonization. According to Ogbu and Simon (1998), generally speaking, Chinese immigrants tend to belong to the voluntary immigrant group. Compared to involuntary minorities, voluntary immigrants are more willing to adapt to mainstream society with more optimistic motivations and they view education more positively, even in white-dominated institutions. As a result of this perspective, as well as the role of community cultural forces<sup>6</sup>, voluntary immigrant students have better academic performance than involuntary minority students. Voluntary immigrants also trust and support white-dominated institutions and view learning the dominant language and culture as a welcome addition to their original stance rather than a threat to their original identity. In summary, voluntary immigrants experience less transitional hardships and cultural problems compared to

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<sup>6</sup> The term community cultural forces refer to students', parents', and the cultural community's emphasis on hard work, family honour, and obtaining a good education as the means to success.

involuntary minorities.

### Issues of Mental Health

Mori (2000) contends that, although international students do experience adjustment stress from linguistic, academic, financial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal sources, this group of students has always remained one of the quietest, least visibly stressed, and underserved groups on American campuses. Samuel (2005) examined South Asian students' perceptions of racism experienced in Canadian universities, especially in terms of faculty-student interaction, peer group interaction, curriculum, and psychosocial dimensions of racism. Samuel (2005) argues that hidden and subtle racism exists in South Asian students' daily Canadian university life, which adversely affects their educational experiences. In the conclusion of the study, Samuel (2005) calls for Canadian educators to develop a more caring school environment to accommodate diverse students' needs. It also suggests that minority issues should be explicitly integrated into the formal curriculum.

In an exploratory study to investigate mental health concerns and coping strategies among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrant secondary school students, Yeh and Inose (2002) indicate that the most common problems for these Asian immigrant students are communication difficulties, cultural differences, interpersonal, academic, and career problems. A social support network is a coping strategy frequently adopted by Asian immigrant students. The study urges mental health professionals working with this group to incorporate social support networks into their professional outreach to help these students cope with their problems more effectively.

Shrake and Rhee (2004) examined Korean American adolescents' mental problems from

the new perspective of three dimensions of ethnic identity: the level of ethnic identity, attitudes toward other groups, and perceived discrimination. The results indicate that a well-developed sense of belonging to one's ethnic identity, minimal exposure to discrimination, and adequate academic performance contribute greatly to Asian American youths' psychological well-being and their adaptation behaviours. Educational institutions and mental health programs are increasingly expected to play important roles in promoting Asian American youths' psychological adjustment. For example, there is a greater emphasis on incorporating ethnic community and history courses into a multicultural curriculum and also into teachers' and administrators' in-service training. There is also the need for more cultural diversity workshops and the need to hire more ethnic minority staff.

Throughout the literature review, I found that most studies on international and immigrant students focus on their transitional experiences concerned with adjustment, adaptation, and acculturation processes, their academic related issues, and issues of mental health. It is also worth noting here that some studies found that transitional experiences change greatly after one semester or one academic year. This time factor appears to imply that international and immigrant students become more and more comfortable in the host Western country after one year of study. If this is the case, after an immersion in Canadian universities for one year, these students will have significantly different experiences in their later-year studies in comparison to earlier years. However, little research explores minority students' later-year experiences and impressions of their later changes. This gap in the research, as well as my curiosity about Chinese students' unique experiences, has inspired me to explore Chinese students' later-year experiences and their perceptions about their own

significant changes during their studies in Canadian universities. This study will help readers better understand the question of whether or not Canadian post-secondary education is providing the best preparation for both Chinese international and immigrant students for future work and life in either or both Chinese and Western contexts. If students agree that they have received the best preparation, then what are the students' standards or comparisons to measure their achievements? If a finding is that the Chinese students do not believe they have received the preparation they deserve, then what supports and alternative preparations should be made available for future Chinese students?

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Personal and Cultural Introduction

Since the day I began my university life majoring in English in China, I dreamed of studying abroad to experience the English language first hand. Not only did I want to acquire English more fully as a second language, but I also wanted to learn and know first-hand about its peoples and cultures. After years of hard work, my dream came true. I am now studying at a Canadian university as a Chinese immigrant student, experiencing the exhilarating and challenging factors of Canadian university life. This Canadian experience surprises me, inspires me, pleases me, and at the same time, troubles and confuses me. I am confident that other Chinese students will have similar impressions, which is one of the pivotal reasons that I am motivated to conduct this study into Chinese students' perceptions of their Canadian educational experiences.

My personal and cultural background is relevant to this study because my ethnic and cultural background is central to the study and gives me an insider stance to better understand the participants and quickly establish a rapport to collect more authentic and meaningful data. According to Lynch (1997), Chinese communication belongs to a high-context cultural exchange because instead of relying on verbal interactions, people from Asia tend to emphasize nonverbal and indirect cues and messages, such as gestures, unarticulated moods, pauses, and silences. On the other hand, people from low-context cultures such as Anglo-European Americans focus their communication exchanges more on precise, direct, logical, and verbal communication. Hence, my linguistic and cultural abilities can help me to better understand and interpret the findings of the study. Also, my competent English skills

will enable me to accurately translate interviews conducted in Mandarin into English.

### Research Design

This study intends to understand both Chinese international and immigrant students' experiences in Canadian universities from a later-year perspective, and to collect their reflections about the significant changes that occurred to them during the continuum of their Western postsecondary education. A qualitative research design is the most appropriate methodology for this study because it allows the researcher to explore and reconstruct these experiences and perceptions along with the participants. From the range of qualitative research approaches, the phenomenological approach is adopted for this study because it focuses on "exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Patton (2002) further argues that it "requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 104). As a Chinese immigrant researcher, I want to collectively make sense of a western educational experience with fellow Chinese students and examine the phenomenon of Chinese students in Canadian universities as carefully and thoroughly as I can.

### *Setting*

Three Chinese international students and another three Chinese immigrant students were selected from a small comprehensive Canadian university with approximately 6,200 full-time graduate and undergraduate students. The university has 1,600 employees, and offers a broad range of degree and diploma programs within eight faculties: Business Administration,



Education, Engineering, Forestry and the Forest Environment, Medicine, Professional Schools, Science and Environmental Studies, and Social Sciences and Humanities. The other six participants are all from four metropolitan universities in either Ontario or the western provinces. Two of the large universities in the province of Ontario offer full and part-time graduate and undergraduate degree programs to almost 50,000 students across approximately 10 faculties; the other two large, comprehensive universities in the western provinces have both been established for more than 100 years. Each of these universities offers hundreds of degrees to a population of around 28,000 students.

The rationale for using different campus groups in the study include the following: (a) it provides a more holistic view of Chinese students' experiences in Canadian universities; (b) there can be a comparison between the small university setting with a small Chinese student population to larger metropolitan university settings with larger Chinese student populations; and (c) the comparison also provides a greater cross-sectional view of Chinese students' experiences and the impacts of different Canadian university programs and support systems.

### *Sample*

As Patton (2002) claims, "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 245). Therefore, a purposeful sampling strategy was used in this study to provide in-depth, rich information. A representative sample of twelve Chinese students was selected to participate in this study from a pool of prospective interviewees. The criteria for selecting participants was that they were either Chinese international or Chinese immigrant students who were in their

later-year phase in any of the various university programs for either a bachelor, masters, or doctoral degree. They had experienced full-time Canadian higher education for a minimum of two academic years, and they belonged to the age group of twenty to thirty-five year olds. Among the participants, Lily, Mac, and Queena (to maintain confidentiality, names used for participants are pseudonyms) were immigrant students studying in the small Canadian university. At the time of the interviews, they were all involved in their final-year of graduate study majoring in either Engineering or Education programs. Jack, David and Dan were another three immigrant students chosen from large, metropolitan university settings in Ontario and the western provinces of Canada. Jack was also an engineering student in his final-year of graduate study. David was in his third-year of undergraduate study, majoring in agriculture, as agriculture is a highly reputed program in that university. Dan was also in the third year of his undergraduate, only he was enrolled in a Kinesiology program.

Three Chinese international students, Francis, Cathy and Amie were also chosen from the small Canadian university. Francis and Amie are graduate students who majored in education and business. Cathy is an undergraduate international student in the general arts program. Another three Chinese international students, Pearl, Jane and Abella were chosen from large, metropolitan university settings in Ontario and the western provinces and they are all involved in business programs. At the time of the interviews, all the international students were in the last-year of their graduate or undergraduate study period.

## Research Process

### *Selection of Participants*

To locate and gain a total of twelve Mainland Chinese participants from these different universities, I first contacted the leaders of the International Student Offices, Chinese Student Associations, or staff in the Office of Graduate Programs and Research in each university by phone or email. I described the nature of the study and the sample requirements, asked for their help in forwarding my study call to a list of potential participants, and I then personally contacted the potential participants to clearly describe the nature of the study, and thanked them for their voluntary participation.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

The narrative data and visual cues for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. Interviewing was the most appropriate way to collect data for this study's purpose because it allowed me to better understand and capture the interviewees' feelings, thoughts, and intentions from their perspectives. For these semi-structured interviews (Appendix A), I proceeded by employing an open-ended question battery in order to provide "topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject" (Patton, 2002, p. 342). According to Patton (2002), another advantage of the semi-structured interview is that it makes interviews among different interviewees "more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (p. 342). Based on this premise, some guiding questions were asked, and participants discussed and expanded upon their own experiences.

Each participant was allowed to choose either Chinese or English for the interviews based upon their own comfort and preference. The rationale for providing this choice of language was that only by using the language that participants were comfortable with, could they express

their ideas and feelings more clearly, easily, and vividly. All of the participants, except one, chose to communicate in Chinese as they commonly believed it was more comfortable and effective to use their native language. The single participant who chose to use English did so for the purpose of improving his oral English proficiency. Data collected in Chinese were translated by me, the researcher, and returned to each participant in person or by mail to check whether the translation captured exactly what he/she wanted to express.

For the six volunteer participants from the small university, face-to-face interviews were conducted individually for approximately one hour in private locations, comfortable and accessible to the participants at their convenience. For the six volunteer participants from the large metropolitan universities, a one-time phone or internet interview was done with each individual for approximately 60 minutes.

All the interviews were audio recorded for data transcription and analysis. I also took notes during each interview and used a research journal to keep track of personal reflections on each interview for data analysis. All the data were transcribed verbatim and returned to the participants for an accuracy check. Two weeks after the mail delivery I contacted the participants for any changes or additional comments.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Data analysis was a critical stage in the process of research, which began upon the first interaction with the participants and lasted throughout the whole study. According to Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2006), data collection and analysis is a continuous interaction, “so that the researcher’s emerging hunches or thoughts become the focus for the next data collection period” (p. 468). However, it is cautioned that premature conclusions should be avoided in order to permit for an emergent nature of qualitative design (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Patton, 2002).

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), content analysis involves identifying codes, categories, and themes that emerge from the data. Once each interview transcript or interpretation was confirmed by the participant, I read through the data at least twice to aid reflection. I first used terms and phrases to summarize the participants' responses and wrote them down in margins on the data copies. Recurring patterns were then identified and coded. The data was coded while the data collection was being conducted. Then I sorted the codes into categories. Finally, themes were identified according to how the categories connected and related to one another.

### Ethical Issues

Each interviewee was informed by a cover letter of the study's purpose, topic, and relevant ethical issues (Appendix B for participants from the small university, and Appendix C for participants from the large universities). A consent letter was also given to each participant (Appendix D for participants from the small university, and Appendix E for participants from the large universities). The contents included emphasis on the voluntary participation, with no potential benefits or risks, anonymity and confidentiality, the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind, the storage of data for seven years by my supervisor—Dr. Lisa Korteweg, and information on the dissemination of findings—a copy of the completed study available at the Lakehead University Education Library. Each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form to participate in the interview which was returned to the researcher in person, by mail, fax, or as an electronic attachment.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter describes the highlights of the research data of Chinese students' perceptions about their Canadian educational experiences from a later-year perspective. When reporting participants' quotes, I have attached a simple code to provide more identification: INS stands for international students while IMS is the notation for the immigrant students.

### Major Themes of the Study

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (1) perspectives from a later-year point of view; (2) expectations and outcomes of the Canadian university education; (3) students' perceived contributions to Canadian higher education, society and Chinese society; and, lastly, (4) students' suggestions for Canadian professors, future Chinese students, and university staff. I will present and detail each one of these themes below.

#### *Theme 1: Perspectives from a Later-Year Point of View*

Issues raised by these twelve participants were mainly related to their later-year experiences in Canadian universities. Their comments fall into four main subsections of academic, financial, cultural, and relationship issues at the last stage of their university studies.

##### *Academic issues: More challenging.*

All the participants, no matter the size of the universities, were acutely aware and reflective of the different teaching and learning styles between the two educational systems, especially after two years of study. As Queena, an immigrant student, reflected: "There is just

no time to ponder what characteristics Canadian teaching has in the first year of study because we (Chinese students) were so busy in keeping up with and finishing the heavy study load.”

Five out of the six international students of this study are enrolled in undergraduate programs in different Canadian universities. In the first year, they generally took the required courses with dozens of or even hundreds of Canadian students in one classroom, depending on the size of their university. The predominant pedagogy of these classes was conventional instructor-centred lectures. After class, the Chinese students, like their local counter-parts mainly reviewed textbook readings and class notes as many times as needed in order to memorize and pass exams. This was a style of pedagogy that was very familiar to the students as it was very similar to Chinese teaching and learning practices. When asked to describe their first-year academic experiences in a Canadian university, Pearl explained in the following way:

In the first year, we mainly had general courses. Usually there were 100-200 students in each class. At the beginning of the semester, we would know the course outline. In class, professors usually taught in the form of lecture, we did homework after class and then took exams. (Pearl, INS)

Dan also shared a similar point of view:

In the first year, the courses I took were all basic courses, with the great help provided by the professors and students from the small university, I didn't feel it hard. (Dan, INS)

The depth and breadth of knowledge acquired in the first year was not a big challenge for these Chinese participants who had a comparatively strong foundation of content knowledge gained from their secondary education in China. Therefore, the first-year study in Canadian universities was not academically harder than most participants expected.

But from the second year on, due to smaller class size, a Canadian teaching and learning style became more distinguishable and observable. The Chinese students' first major observation of the pedagogical changes in these smaller classes was a classroom environment characterised by students' empowerment: students were encouraged to behave freely, to express their own ideas, and to even argue with professors. For example, Amie noted this characteristic of the Canadian teaching and learning environment:

I like the Canadian learning environment, for example, it is very active and lively. Students can express whatever they want to say and I enjoy the equal and democratic learning environment. (Amie, INS)

The second observation of a distinct Canadian teaching and learning style was the encouragement of students' participation in the learning process. For example, most participants admitted that they felt stressed by the high demands of learning methods such as presentations and group projects. Pearl noted:

From the second year on, the class size was much smaller. It turned out to be twenty to forty students in a classroom. There were a lot of (student) presentations in classes, and I had more contact with professors from the second year on. (INS)

Jane, another international student, also commented that "in China, we (Chinese students) were used to studying individually, but here in Canada we were assigned with so much group work and many presentations which required us to be involved in the whole class". Although the Chinese students had already been exposed to such learning methods that highly encouraged students' participation in the first year, they all found the higher frequency and quality demands became more challenging for them in their later-year program period.

From the second year on, the international undergraduate students chose their major and began courses in particular faculties in order to learn the specialized knowledge of their major.



When explaining the reasons for their perception of greater academic difficulty in their later-year stage of study, Jane and Pearl responded in the following ways:

One difference between the first year and the later years was that there was an increasing study load year after year. The higher year we were in, the more difficult the courses became. We began to have access to professional knowledge. For the first two years, I could just say whatever I knew, whatever I had experienced and whatever I wanted to say. But in the third and fourth years, what we learned was more abstract and theoretical. Especially for international students who had little work experience, it was more difficult to understand the theory and how things work. That entailed more reading time, more comprehension, so it was really difficult. (Jane, INS)

From the second year on, I was in the business school. We began to take special courses which are more difficult and more specialized than most courses in the first year. I had more pressure than I had in the first year because if I failed these courses, I couldn't continue to learn. Therefore I spent more time in studying. (Pearl, INS)

With the Chinese immigrant students, four out of the six were engaged in graduate studies. These immigrant students also found that the later-year study period was not becoming easier as they had expected; however, their reasons are noticeably different from those of the undergraduate students. In the first year of graduate studies, the immigrant graduate students spent a lot of time discussing the topics with professors and fellow students in classes. But, by the second year, graduate students generally begin to do their own research that requires more self-direction and independent study. Queena, an immigrant student, commented:

In the first year, I experienced pressure over taking exams. I had never taken exams before in Canadian university and I was very nervous because I didn't know what professors were expecting. In the second year, I got more free time to search related information for my research project, but I don't think I was less stressed. However, I did have more control of the study process and I like this part. (Queen, IMS)

Simultaneously, other immigrant participants attributed their learning problems in the second-year stage to the unexpected complexities and difficulties of research work. Queen, an immigrant student, commented:

Mac, Francis, Lily, and Amie all commented that “it (the research process) was a long journey.” For example, Francis explained that “it was frustrating because sometimes I didn’t know where and how the thesis was going.” Lily also experienced the same difficulty, as she stated: “I felt most frustrated when problems arose, but I didn’t know what they were and how they came to be.”

Another factor that increased the academic difficulties of the later-years stage for both Chinese immigrant and international students was the higher demand for independent thinking abilities. Individualism is not well valued in Chinese education systems; rather, the dominant cultural stance is that students just need to pursue standardized answers to various kinds of examinations. However, in most of the participants’ later-years Canadian learning experiences, individual perception and independent reasoning abilities were emphasized by Canadian professors; thus, it increased the academic difficulty for these Chinese students who had been immersed in various kinds of standardized examinations for at least twelve years.

Lily’s statements best reveal the students’ impressions of these later-years difficulties:

Because it (second-year of program) was a small-size class, professors could pay enough attention to each student. Besides, they didn’t emphasize which answer was right and which was wrong, but encouraged you to do the analysis according to the knowledge what you have obtained. How you arrive at the results and how you explain your results are what they emphasize. This is what is lacking in Chinese education. (Lily, IMS)

It is worth noting that most participants in this study expressed a sincere preference for the Canadian teaching and learning style that encourages students’ reasoning and independent thinking abilities. The participants attributed their academic difficulties in adjusting to this pedagogy to a lack of exposure and familiarity in their previous educational experiences in China, rather than an inferior academic ability to acquire and accomplish it. Jane, Francis and

Queena's reflections about the two kinds of educational experiences to which they had been exposed explains and substantiates the overall attitude of the Chinese participant group:

In Canadian classrooms, they emphasize participation and showing your own opinion. Usually, there are class participation marks for each course to encourage your vocal participation in class. Canadian students are encouraged to express their own opinions since they were small, so it is natural for Canadian students to communicate with each other frequently in class. But Chinese students are more restrained in their expression due to their traditional education system where teachers are the authority who imparts knowledge and the students' responsibility is to learn, but not question. Besides, their English language limitation accelerates their unwillingness to express their own ideas in front of so many people...When Chinese students come to study in a Canadian university, they need to catch up with all these things. (Jane, INS)

In China, the teaching methods are generally more teacher-centered instead of student-centered. Students do a lot of listening and rote learning. But here in Canada, teachers are more like a guide who gives you instructions, comments and suggestions, while students can do whatever they want to. Chinese students really have to work hard to do these things well because we don't have much experience to draw upon. The academic environment here is very relaxing and encouraging. Students are cooperative and approachable. We can ask questions from teachers, who are very supportive. I like this kind of teaching very much, although I had difficulty in doing it as well as I expected. (Francis, INS)

I was stressed about this kind of teaching and learning method that emphasized the student's initiative to learn. I was not used to it because I hadn't had the chance to do it in my culture or from my childhood. If I had been given the environment and chance to do it from an earlier time, it wouldn't have been that hard. (Queena, IMS)

The participants did emphasize a need by the Canadian university to build in more time and exposure in supportive classroom environments to allow Chinese students to catch up with local Canadian students who had already been exposed and immersed in this kind of teaching and learning.

A third reason helps to explain why the participants experienced more stress in their later-year study period. The Chinese participants explained that in the second or later years of their Canadian programs, they could no longer dedicate 100% of their time and energy on

studying as they had before. Other worries and concerns about future career development or financial burdens became more prominent issues than their academic grades. When asked about their first-year foci, every participant gave academic related answers: regardless of the subject; they were concentrating on how to pass exams, how to improve English to facilitate their studies, or how to adjust to their professors' teaching styles or accents. However, the students' answers varied greatly in response to the question of focus in their later-year stages. The time spent on their studies was reduced; in its place, the Chinese students began to spend more and more time on their future career plans, their involvement in social events, or how to repay their accumulated debt. Cathy's comments clearly reveal this change: "it was impossible to only focus on studying in the later years of my program." Pearl, also an international student, recognized "in the first year, I still cared a lot about my GPA, but I no longer cared much about it from the third year on."

In summary, one significant finding of the students' accounts reveals that the participants' later-year stage of academic experience is not less stressful than the first year; on the contrary, it is more demanding. Yet, the first-year adjustment and the gains of knowing more about Canadian university teaching, learning, and professors' expectations, Chinese students had accumulated enough skills to better handle their later-year Canadian studies. As Cathy recalled, "the first year of my studies built a good foundation for the second-year of studies, especially my language improvement in reading and my better communication abilities with professors."

#### *Financial issues.*

In the first year of study, all the participants mainly relied on their savings, student loans,

parental support, as well as teaching or graduate assistantships (for the graduate students) to cover tuition and living expenses. However, from the second year on, the students managed to gain more sources of financial support. Mac won an Ontario Graduate Scholarship; Lily received a Research Assistantship; Jack earned an honorarium by working in the Student Society; while Cathy, Amie, Dan, Jane, and Abella all worked part-time jobs to support their studying and living in Canada.

Although immigrant students could apply for student loans to help with tuition costs, most of the participants felt that overall loans increased their stress with the accumulation of greater debts. For example, when asked about the later-year experiences from a financial perspective, Dan, an immigrant student responded that “although immigrants pay less tuition than international students do, it is still a heavy burden for a family without income. The student loan helped me a lot, without which I couldn’t attend university.” Influenced by Chinese financial value on savings, the immigrant students felt particularly nervous and uncomfortable with the idea of relying entirely on savings or loans in their later-year study stage. Queena, another immigrant student explained in detail how she felt in her final-year of graduate study:

I still depended on my own savings until the second-year of my study. It was more stressful in the second year. With the time passing, I felt more and more panicked about my financial situation because I only spent money without any actual income. I don’t know when this kind of situation will end. Sometimes I think that graduate study is a little like escaping from real life in some sense. I know sub-consciously that I will encounter difficulty when I begin to seek work in the future. When I am studying, it seems that I can escape from these worries. When it is closer and closer to the graduation, I can’t escape any longer. I have to face my financial difficulties and the competition of finding a good job, choosing what city to go to live in, what kind of job to take for my career and so on. As a result, I feel more stressed now. (Queen, IMS)

It is worth noting that the international participants in this study did not make much

mention about their financial burdens. Their choice to work part-time during their later-year study period was not primarily for financial reasons. Instead, they began to desire to depend more on themselves, rather than on their parents for financial support. Their changed attitude resulted from maturity as well as the influence of western attitudes about financial independence. For example, Cathy commented:

I am not a little girl now. Although there is no difficulty for my parents to support me financially, I felt ashamed to be so dependent on them till now. So I decided to work part time. I could even cover all my living expenses if I work hard. (Cathy, INS)

*Cultural issues.*

In this study, when asked about participants' experiences from a cultural perspective, none of the students thought that they had experienced any culture shock, even at the beginning of their Canadian university study period. In their claims to null culture shock, each participant articulated a personal defence. Jane, an international student, showed her optimistic attitude towards the new Canadian culture. She comments: "I am an open-minded person, so I never had feelings of culture shock." Queena, an immigrant student, clearly states:

I didn't have any culture shock experiences from the beginning. I think it is because of my personality. I am an extraverted person. I like trying new things and meeting new friends. No matter if it is Asian culture or Western culture, there is a lot in common about our nature as humans. The Westerners are human beings after all. So it depends on how you view them. If you think differences are interesting, you will feel much more relaxed. If you just compare your previous Chinese life and your current Canadian life all the time, you will definitely feel culture shock. (Queena, IMS)

Francis and Dan shared a common reason for not experiencing culture shock. They explained that they had learned enough about Western cultures before coming to Canada. Jack also highlights the benefits of Canada's diverse cultural mosaic:

I didn't feel much unadjustment to the local life here in Canada. One reason is that

Canada has multicultural policies. What's more, there is a huge Chinese community in my city, so it is very convenient to get all the living stuff that Chinese people are used to. Local people are very used to this multicultural society too. They respect different cultures. (Jack, IMS)

Lily and Dan, both immigrant students, shared another unique reason for null culture shock in Canada: they state that they do not actually know much about Canadian culture because they spend most of their time with other Chinese. David argues that he does not think there are many differences between Canadian and Chinese values because "people pursue the same things in the Asian and Western worlds. For example, job security, financial security, external recognition and the ability to strive hard to achieve all of these goals."

However, the participants again unanimously agreed that once they knew more about Canadian culture, they were then able to integrate themselves more into Canadian culture during their later-year program stage. The participants realized that they were gaining a deeper understanding of Canadian culture by engaging themselves more in it during the later-year period of study. As both Abella and Jack respond:

I became more accustomed to the Canadian way of teaching and learning, interviewing and thinking... Therefore, I could understand more about Canadian behaviour, but that doesn't mean I will totally follow their behaviour. (Abella, INS)

I became more and more used to the Canadian way of living, which emphasizes both working and enjoying life. Now I have more contact with both an Indonesian and a Canadian friend. It is very good. (Jack, IMS)

What became prominent in the participants' comments was how they developed habits of examining both Canadian and Chinese cultures and tried to reflexively learn the advantages of both cultures. For example, Jack, an immigrant student, illustrates how he examines the two cultures:

Immigrant students are usually older than international students and they have already

developed their own mature worldviews. So, when they come to a new country, they can evaluate both what is good and what is bad of the new dominant culture. They can absorb good aspects of both cultures. (Jack, IMS)

Jane also shared her experiences of trying to understand and integrate into the new culture:

Working a part-time job in the later years provided me with the chance to make contact with more Canadians, which enabled me to become more involved in their culture. In order to improve my English, I tried to avoid hanging around with just Chinese, which helped me to adjust to Western life. Working provided me with a chance to know how to communicate with Canadians, how to deal with tasks, what is Canadian humour, how to cooperate with Canadians, how to perceive money and even lotteries, and so on. I have been continuously comparing the two cultures. (Jane, INS)

*Relationship issues: Stepping beyond the Chinese social circle.*

When commenting on their first-year experiences in getting along with professors and their classmates, only Lily and Mac, the immigrant students from the small university, spoke highly of their frequent contacts with professors and classmates. The reason for this was that their particular faculties were characterized by a good number of Chinese professors and/or students. Hence, their social contact with professors and fellow students were all directed to the Chinese rather than the Canadians.

During the interviews, the reasons provided for a lack of contact with Canadian professors and fellow students in the first year can be summarized as the following: a lack of understanding between each other, a lack of common interest, worries about misunderstandings caused by poor English communication, and the presence of a large proportion of Chinese students. For example, Amie, an international student, comments:

I didn't have much contact with them (Canadian professors, classmates or administrators) in the first year mainly because of the language problem. My classmates are generally very friendly and enthusiastic, and sometimes they have invited me to their houses, but because of the language problem, I didn't have much communication with them. (Amie, INS)



Francis, another international student, comments:

In the first year, I felt a little isolated from the professors and classmates. You know, Chinese students are generally shy and not voluntary or ready to talk with people, so it is difficult for them to get along well with the Canadians at first. (INS)

The participants found themselves in situations where Canadians were friendly and courteous towards them, but they felt hindered in building close relationships, especially in the first year. Another international student, Cathy, pointed out the differences she experienced in making friends in Canada:

It is fast here to make friends. It is quite different here to hang around with friends from those in China. In China, people tend to be cold to each other, but once they know each other and become familiar, they become good friends and the friendship is more and more solid after that. Here, when people hang around, they are quite causal and even close, but the next day, when they return to their normal life, all they tend to do is just to say hi to each other. The relationship seems very unstable, not reliable. (Cathy, INS)

However, in the later-year stage, most participants gained a more positive attitude about dealing with Canadian professors. For most of the graduate immigrant students, they had more contact with their Canadian supervisors for guidance on their research work. As for the international students, they began to voluntarily turn to Canadian professors for extra help.

Jane, another international student, comments, “I had more contact with classmates and professors with the increase of my living experiences in Canada. By reading news, watching TV and movies, and working a part-time job, I knew more topics to talk about with Canadians.”

Other participants shared their experiences in how to manage and develop better contact with the Canadian professors in the following ways:

I had more contact with professors because I took some courses with smaller class sizes. When I had questions or problems, I would go to the professors for help. In the first year, I would have just let the problems continue, but, from the second year on, I realized that I could solve them in different ways. Professors helped me a lot and they were good listeners, very nice and considerate. (David, IMS)

I knew more about the professors in my later years of studies. They assisted me to find useful materials and sources for my study, which was very effective and helpful. Canadian professors prefer you to be open and active and they are very patient. (Cathy, INS)

In the second and third years, I took a lot of courses which gave so many assignments. I then often went to the professors for help. Canadian professors like their students to communicate more with them. They could help you find the right direction so that we needn't waste our time doing wrong things. (Abella, INS)

It became easier for me to get along well with professors in the second year. In China, we were always told to respect teachers by distance and it seemed that we, as students, were all more or less scared of teachers. But here in Canada, I began to realize that respecting teachers doesn't mean being afraid of them. (Jack, IMS)

Although most participants had more and more contact with professors, their relationship with Canadian classmates varied. Graduate students, no matter international or immigrant students, had less contact with their Canadian classmates because of the nature of independent research. Each student, Chinese or Canadian, was busy doing independent research in the later-year stage of their graduate studies. Contrastingly, the undergraduate students began to have more contact with their Canadian counterparts. In their later-year studies, there were more group-work assignments. The Chinese students began to realize the English and cultural benefits gained from cooperative learning with their classmates, so they actively cooperated with Canadian students more than they did in the first year. As Abella comments:

I had more contact with my classmates in the second year. I realized that the most important ability is to find ways to let others help you study. For example, one person can't finish all the reading material, because there are thousands of pages to complete every week. But if I study with a partner and we share our readings and discussions, it was much easier and more effective. (Abella, INS)

As to the question of the students' relationships with administration in each university, no matter the size of the university, the only thing that these participants emphasized was the

International Student Office or the International Student Center (different universities have different names for the same type of administrative office). The participants, especially the international students, were more impressed with the assistance provided by the staff working in these administrative offices because they are comparatively more sensitive and concerned about the unique needs of this group of students. As Abella, an international student, comments, “the international center in my university has done a good job, such as organizing activities like skiing, parties, immigration lectures, renewing documents, parental visits, etc.”

Cathy, another international student, shared similar experiences:

I had a good relationship with the coordinator in the International Student Office. She knew more about how international students were experiencing Canadian university life, she was more willing to listen to our worries and troubles, and she often gave us suggestions, so I often chatted with her. (Cathy, INS)

However, Jane, also an international student coming from a large university, pointed out that her university’s website was good enough for her to obtain the various kinds of school registration and requirements information to a point that she did not need to turn to administrative staff for help.

At the same time, students from both small and big universities point out the bureaucratic problems related to academic rules, regulations, or credit systems. Jack and

Francis share similar comments:

Higher education institutions in Canada are huge organizations, and they also have some bureaucratic features similar to the situation in China. I got the chance to have meetings with administrators or officers from the faculty, university, provincial or federal levels because I worked in the Student Society. Sometimes, they were very bureaucratic. For example, if a student got something wrong with their registration, they had to wait for a long time for it to be solved because they had to go to different departments and wait for their reply for quite a long time. Therefore, it is OK if everything goes smoothly, but once something goes wrong, it is very complicated and troublesome. (Jack, IMS)

As for the university staff, they were usually very nice, but sometimes when you went to ask for help, it seemed that they didn't know very much about their own responsibilities: they sent me to other departments and when I went to those departments, they sent me back to the first department I went to. It was frustrating because I was lost and they were not helpful. (Francis, INS)

## *Theme 2: Expectations and Outcomes*

The second theme identified through the analysis of the transcripts is expectations for and outcomes achieved from Canadian post-secondary education. Three main expectations explain the participants' decision to opt for Canadian higher education over Chinese degrees: obtaining a North-American degree for future career prosperity, a desire for change or personal development, and reconsidering their life direction.

### *Expectation A: Obtaining a North-American degree for future career prosperity.*

Both the Chinese international and immigrant students place high value on the role of education in social mobility. As a result, promising employment prospects was the priority that these students focused on in their Canadian higher education decisions. When asked the reasons for further study in a Canadian university, Jane concludes that her "original motivation was to go abroad to get a diploma or degree because many other people were doing it."

Francis, another international student, believes that it was very important to get a Western education,

...because education serves as a buffer to give you time to know Canadian society and culture, which is helpful for your future choices. At the same time, you can obtain the degree. Employers accept the degree here, but not your prior Chinese credentials. The degree is helpful for getting a job here. (Francis, INS)

Jack, an immigrant student, describes his own experiences that motivated him to study in a Canadian university:

Before I studied, I did a labour job for some time. Then I knew that labour work was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It makes no sense in Canada if I could only get labour jobs and earn less money than I did in China. I know many Chinese immigrants who live a poor life in Canada. They can only get labour jobs and claim that they live in Canada only for the welfare of their children. But if the parents live a stressful life and put a lot of pressure on their children, it is impossible for their children to grow up healthy and confident. My current motivation to pursue a Canadian university education is to find a satisfying job and to put what I had learned into practice. I hope to work in a big company because big companies will have a multicultural environment and provide more opportunities for employees' full development. (Jack, IMS)

There is a significant difference between the previous experiences of Chinese international and immigrant students. Each immigrant participant had experienced difficulty or frustration in finding a satisfying professional job in Canadian workplaces since immigrating. For example, Mac recalls:

After immigrating to Canada, I planned to find a job in computer data analysis in Canadian companies, but that failed. The main reason was that my previous academic credentials and working experiences gained in China were not recognized or valued here in Canada. Besides, I landed on August 21, 2001, just a couple of days before 9/11. Influenced by 9/11, it was more difficult to get satisfactory work. Then I found many immigrants around me who were studying or planning to study. Therefore, I made my decision to receive a Canadian higher education too. (Mac, IMS)

Dan, also an immigrant student who landed in 2001, shares his similar experiences:

Generally speaking, immigrants' previous working and educational credentials in their original countries are hardly equally recognized by Canadian employers. Therefore, I hope it will be helpful for me to find a good professional job after getting a Canadian higher education degree. In 2002, the Canadian economy was not good due to the influence of 9/11. Many of my acquaintances couldn't find satisfying jobs. I didn't get any full-time professional job either, so I just did some part-time labour jobs. Then I decided to get a Canadian degree. (Dan, IMS)

Another immigrant student, David, clearly states that finding gainful employment after graduation was his primary expectation:

As a first-generation, visible minority immigrant, it is extremely hard or even impossible to completely change my low social status in this new land. But I can improve my quality of life by earning more money to enhance my financial situation. Obtaining a Canadian-recognized higher education degree will help me to achieve this dream. (David, IMS)

Unlike the immigrant students, most international students in this study did not experience the same hardship of professional recognition because they pursued Canadian higher education directly after their secondary studies. However, these international students still regard obtaining a North-American degree as the means to find future lucrative or profitable employment within a global context. Francis and Amie both articulate this desire as one of their reasons for studying abroad:

The reason for studying abroad is that in China now, it is very competitive. We need to get higher degrees to get or maintain a job. So, from an economic perspective, I think studying abroad for a Masters degree is worthwhile and beneficial for me to get a good job in the future. (Francis, IMS)

I wish to obtain a Masters degree from a Western country for future and better career development. (Amie, IMS)

*Expectation B: A desire for change or personal improvement.*

All the participants admitted that they decided to go to Canada because they wanted a change of routine in their life and their social milieu. For example, Dan, an immigrant student, clearly expresses this desire: “I want to improve my life, and I don’t want to stay in the same place for all my life.” Differences are noticeable in the reasons for changing countries of residence between the Chinese immigrant and international students. Immigrant students showed a clear dissatisfaction about previous work. As Queena comments:

I got so tired after working industriously in CCTV in China for several years. It is a hard working place crowded with many talented people, so I felt very stressed because every month some employees had to quit due to the severe competition. I needed some rest because I didn’t want to break down totally. However, I didn’t want to waste my time by having an idle break. Then I thought of studying. I would rather go abroad to study than spend several years in a Chinese university. It is very popular for youth to go abroad to study nowadays because Western higher education seems to have more value than its Chinese counterpart. Secondly, I wanted to improve my English. I had attended English as a second language classes numerous times in China, but didn’t achieve good results. I finally ended up abandoning these classes due to many reasons such as my busy work life. My work required me to have good English proficiency because I had access to Westerners. Therefore, I had to bring translators with me and it was very inconvenient

and inefficient. Thirdly, I wanted to have a back-up for my elder years. I had no idea which country was a better place for me to develop, China or Canada. Immigration can at least provide me with another choice. (Queena, IMS)

On the other hand, the Chinese international students seemed to want more of a social adventure and new sensory experiences. As Amie comments, “all I wanted was to remove myself from the familiarity and experience significant changes in everything.” Cathy also attributes one of her reasons to study abroad as a way to gain richer experiences in order to improve herself.

*Expectation C: searching for clearer life direction.*

The international participants also expected to gain a clearer vision of future life and future choices through the process of studying abroad. Typical of their young age group, the international students were not very sure what they wanted to do after their high school or university educations in China, hence, they chose to embark upon overseas study as a way to gain time and perspective to figure out what to do in the future. As Cathy reflects:

I did nothing but follow my parents' arrangements and expectations. My dad told me that he would like me to receive a different education so that it would help me become a more successful person. In other words, getting a beautiful university degree from a Western country is supposed to provide me with more wonderful opportunities. I had no idea how exactly that would work, but I was glad to try, because for me it was so exciting. I had a feeling of adventuring in the world, so I didn't oppose but supported my parents' suggestions. (Cathy, INS)

Abella also shares uncertainties at the initial decision of her Canadian studies and when she had to leave China and her family:

The reasons and purposes were not very clear at that time that I left. I was only 18 years old when I decided to go abroad. The reasons and purposes were clearer and clearer after I began my studies in Canada. The original reason for my overseas studies was that my parents didn't want me to receive higher education in China. In China, it was really hard to be enrolled in higher education, but once enrolled, it was quite easy to finish it and get a degree. Chinese students just don't learn much from their university education. (Abella, INS)

In summary, the primary and original expectation for all the participants to study in Canadian universities was for future economic prosperity. There were other secondary but minor expectations such as a change of life, personal improvement, or a reconsideration of future life directions.

Another major concern explored in this study is whether these students fulfilled their expectations through their investments in Canadian higher education. Through the analysis of the data, it was found that all the participants, in some way, changed their original expectations for a Canadian education. Accordingly, their worldviews and perspectives were transformed greatly with their immersion in Canadian universities and an accumulation of time in Canadian society. Six major outcomes are revealed to have made a significant difference to these participants and their overall impressions of the worth of a Canadian university education.

*Outcome A: Improvement of independent thinking abilities.*

One noticeable finding through the data analysis was that most participants were very impressed by the two capabilities that were well cultivated and enhanced by Canadian higher education: independent thinking abilities and a strong interior motivation to learn. All the participants had been immersed in Chinese formal education for at least twelve years before they attended Canadian universities. The international and immigrant students shared similar feelings when they compared the two education systems' impact on them. For example, Jane, an international student comments:

It seemed to me that studying in a Chinese university was not as stressful as studying in a Canadian university, because back in China, there was such a strong mentality that studying was not something for the students themselves, but for their parents and for



other people's expectations and judgements. But here in Canada, study is more of the students' own business, their own judgements. (Jane, INS)

Two other international students, Cathy and Pearl, were impressed by the Canadian professors' emphasis of students' independence, individualism, and initiative to learn. They comment:

Chinese teachers know Chinese students are too shy to ask questions, so they keep asking you whether you have questions even if you don't tell them that you need some help. But Canadian professors are different. They prefer you to be open and to show initiative. They would be very patient in helping you, but if you do not go to them for help voluntarily, you will lose the chance to be helped. (Cathy, INS)

Canadian higher education provides students with more space for individual development while Chinese education is stiffer. (Pearl, INS)

Dan, an immigrant student also remarks:

Canadian professors just provide you with a direction, but no details. Therefore, it is beneficial to cultivate academic independence. But I don't think it is helpful to build a solid foundation of knowledge in this way. In China, teachers are more like babysitters, who monitor students' learning very strictly, so it is helpful at that stage for students to build a solid foundation of knowledge. (Dan, IMS)

Canadian higher education emphasizes students' active participation in presentations, discussions and arguments, as well as the student's self-motivation to learn, especially in their later-year study period. Canadian professors act as facilitators to help or guide students, rather than as authorities who discipline and monitor carefully students' learning. It is worth noting that Chinese immigrant and international students were not well prepared for this pedagogical change and they were both surprised at the Canadian "care-less" academic environment. However, similarly, both international and immigrant students began to realize the value of this approach after they had been immersed in their Canadian studies for some time.

In China, all the students are in one class usually with the same schedule. But here, students are free to choose whatever courses they like and want to take. Nobody is responsible for your registration or selection of classes. All depends on the students

themselves. I felt perplexed at first, but later on, I found that it was actually helpful to nurture the student's ability of independence. (Dan, IMS)

In China, teachers push students to learn as much as possible, but here, nobody cares except you. You are responsible for taking enough courses according to the program's outline. It depends on you to decide how much effort and time to devote...At first when I read, I just read everything literally and accepted totally what I read. But now when reading, I can view what I read from a range of perspectives and I can think more critically. (Jane, INS)

In China, we were used to being carefully led by teachers' instructions. However, in Canada, professors just tell students the goal and direction, and it all depends on the students themselves to figure out how and how much to achieve. Now, I realize that it actually provides students with a lot of potential space to develop their own way of learning and living. (Abella, INS)

I didn't have much time and energy to think much about the characteristics of Canadian teaching and learning in the first semester. I spent all my time trying to adjust to the Canadian classes, which were quite different from their Chinese counterparts. In China, teachers gave the lectures, and students most of the time just needed to write down the notes, review after class and get ready for the exams. But professors here in Canada give little lecture, and they just ask students to do many readings at home by themselves to get ready for the class discussion. I think this kind of teaching method is good for a higher education level. Chinese traditional teaching methods are good for elementary and secondary education because children at that age need someone push to work hard on their learning so that they can build a solid foundation of basic knowledge. But at a higher education level, it should value creativity and personality as Canadian higher education emphasizes. I felt stressed about this kind of teaching and learning method because of my unfamiliarity. If I had been given the environment and chance to do it from an earlier time, it wouldn't have been that hard. (Queenia, IMS)

Professors here are different from those in China in that they don't interfere with students' learning, no matter the learning, contents, methods or even students' achievements. They never offered me help. (Amie, INS)

It was strange and hard for me at first because in Canadian classes, students were responsible for preparing and giving lessons; professors just helped us when we had problems in understanding some particularly difficult parts. (Mac, IMS)

The students' enhanced independent thinking abilities were not only reflected in their academic activities, but also in their personal lives. For example, Cathy and Abella, both international students who came abroad following their parents' plans and arrangements, had

taken responsibility and ownership for their own future. As Cathy remarks:

I am now more responsible for my own life. My original behaviour was to follow my parents' motivation. Personally, at first, I want to have fun and be far away from my parents' control, but now I strive for a higher social status with a higher education degree. (Cathy, INS)

And according to Abella:

At first, the motivation for my studies was to satisfy my parents because they paid a lot for my studies in spite of whether I liked studying or not. Later, I achieved some sense of pride because I was recognized by others through my own efforts. I was more confident and improved a lot. The most effective motivation that helps me go through these years is that I begin to have plans for my own future life, and I am now working hard to achieve them. (Abella, INS)

Another three international students, Amie, Pearl and Jane, also agree that the frustration and hardship that they sometimes experienced in Canadian universities actually helped them to become more independent than they used to be. Amie explains:

I had some frustration during my thesis writing in the later-year stage. However, this provided me with a wonderful chance to learn how to deal with difficulties and frustrations. I am the only child in my family, and before going abroad, I had never lived an independent life. I was not good at solving problems because I seldom experienced hard times. But now, I am more mature after experiencing some frustration and difficulty. (Amie, INS)

Pearl shares similar feelings:

Unlike the Chinese students in China who depend on their parents for everything, Chinese international students have to rely on themselves because they are far away from their families. You know, even if our parents are in high positions in Chinese society, seldom can they be so powerful to influence overseas employers. Therefore, international students have to rely on themselves for getting a good job...If we were still in China now, we would still be relying on our parents a lot and have no motivation for working hard. We could get good jobs so long as our parents wanted to arrange one for us. (Pearl, INS)

Jane, another international student, shares a similar family process:

My original motivation was to go abroad to learn English, to get a diploma or degree because many other people were doing it. But I didn't know what to do next. Now I am more career-focused and I know what to do in the future, what will help me for further

development and what more I need to learn. I am more independent in the way I think and live. I have begun to make plans for my own life. I also begin to make my own decisions about what to do next. I know it is useless to rely on others, so I can only depend on my own effort. I think that I should be economically independent now, so I feel ashamed to ask for money from the family any longer. (Jane, INS)

*Outcome B: Unmet language and cultural competencies.*

Before coming to study in Canadian universities, most of the Chinese participants shared the same expectation of improving their English proficiency and understanding enough Canadian culture and society for effective integration. For example, Queena, an immigrant student, explains her second reason for choosing to study in a Canadian university:

Secondly, I wanted to improve my English. I had attended English as a Foreign Language classes numerous times in China, but didn't achieve good results due to many reasons, such as my busy work schedule. My work required me to have good English proficiency because I had to interview Westerners. Therefore each time I interviewed foreigners, I had to bring translators with me and it was very inconvenient and inefficient. As a result, I assumed studying in a Canadian university would be an effective way to improve my English. (Queena, IMS)

When giving his reasons for studying abroad, Francis recalls:

First of all, I majored in English for my undergraduate degree, so I wanted to go to an English-speaking country to improve my English and experience in person its culture and their way of living. (Francis, INS)

According to Jack, studying abroad allows for an adjustment period:

I think it is beneficial to obtain a North American higher education if you want to get a good career in North American countries. It provides newcomers the time and space to get to know people and society here, which is helpful for Chinese to understand Canadians and get along well with them. (Jack, IMS)

However, the outcome of English language improvement was not as satisfying as most of the participants had expected. For most participants, they agreed that their English had improved, but was not as proficient as they had anticipated. One reason was that the students had overestimated the influence of the English environment on their own individual language

improvement. They assumed that being immersed in a Canadian university would easily influence and improve their language skills and cultural knowledge of Canada. They overlooked the fact that the increasing Chinese population in the Canadian university community would influence their English and Canadian culture acquisition. For example, Jack attributed his limited improvement of language to the huge Chinese community in the city where he lives: “I am not satisfied with my language improvement. There are too many Chinese in my city, so it prevents the improvement of my English.” Lily regrets lost time, “I spent most of my social time with Chinese peers, although there is a small population of Chinese students in this university.”

*Outcome C: Gains of self-confidence.*

Generally speaking, with increased independent thinking abilities, improved language and cultural competencies, there was a concurrent enhancement of Chinese students’ self-confidence. Most participants realized that they had developed a greater capability to perform well in either academic or part-time work compared to their capabilities when they first arrived in Canada. For example, Jane observes:

During these years, without family around me, I learned to overcome various difficulties and adjust to my different situations and moods. By doing all of these things on my own, I am more confident about my abilities. I believe I can do better than others in work, and when I find my own shortcomings, I am more willing to make up for them. (Jane, INS)

The participants were also aware of the dynamic changing process of their self-confidence. For example, Cathy and Amie thought they were very confident when they first came to Canada as international students. Later, when they encountered their first frustrations, they were less confident. As Cathy recalls:

I was regarded as an excellent student when I studied in China, so when I first got

enrolled in a Canadian university, I was still quite egotistic. Actually I didn't know myself well at that time, because I had never experienced big obstacles or frustrations thanks to my parents' protection and help. But when I came abroad, after experiencing some frustrations, I felt less confident. I even felt unwilling to go out of my room to meet people outside. I was like a hurt proud peacock, suddenly realizing I was not as good as I thought it would be. I began to question myself as to why I was treated in this unexpected way. Why I couldn't even get such an easy job as pouring coffee. I felt useless. (Cathy, INS)

However, by continuing to strive for what they wanted to achieve, the students became more capable and more confident. Pearl also shares her own experiences of confidence fluctuations and development during her job search process. Pearl states:

I had more pressure when I sought jobs. I was very confident about my interviews, but the problem was that many companies do not hire international students. So my student status was a big obstacle for me to find a good job, which was really frustrating for me. I was less confident when I had trouble in finding a job at first, but I gained more confidence when I found a job later on. (Pearl, INS)

Jack was also experiencing some changes in his own confidence:

It is a rolling process. At first I was not confident at all. In classes, I couldn't understand others or make myself understood. Later, when I found that I didn't do worse in exams compared to other classmates, I felt a little more confident. But when I began to look for jobs, I lost my confidence again because I was in a disadvantaged position competing with local people. Although I have had Canadian higher education experience now, I still think work is a challenge for me. However, I believe that if I spend more time in searching job information and practicing interview skills, there shouldn't be many problems, so I think I will become more confident again. (Jack, IMS)

#### *Outcome D: Multi-perspectives and worldviews.*

Having been immersed in a Western society such as Canada, most participants tended to become more aware of their original nationality, social norms and worldviews. Francis, Queena, and Pearl all mentioned that they paid special attention to their own socio-cultural behaviours, because they were afraid that Canadians would form a general perception about Chinese people according to their individual behaviours. They did not want to poorly

influence Canadian perceptions or shame other Chinese people. For example, Queena mentioned the importance of honesty in academic performance. She criticized those preceding Chinese students who cheated on exams because their behaviour had led Canadians to distrust or carry prejudice towards other Chinese students' academic abilities and honesty. Pearl, since coming to Canada, began to view China and Chinese cultures from new broadened perspectives. As Pearl states:

The gain by studying abroad is that I know from my own experiences the advantages and disadvantages of China. When living in China, I viewed China from one perspective. On the contrary, since studying in a foreign country, I began to view China from different perspectives. (Pearl, INS)

Immersed in the diverse cultures of Canadian society, Chinese students' worldviews were changing from a predominant single Chinese dimension to multiple cultural dimensions. For example, influenced by Canadian university assessment practices, Abella no longer used academic marks as the only standard to judge herself, from the second year on. As Abella comments:

The Canadian professors are more positive and they praise you in public. They believe every student has their own advantages. Individual values are judged by a variety of standards instead of just by one's academic marks. Therefore, from the third year on, I no longer used the marks as the only standard by which to judge myself. (Abella, INS)

Jack no longer valued only working hard, but tried to pursue a kind of balance between work and the enjoyment of daily life. According to him:

Traditional Chinese culture is that study is the priority for all students, and all other issues can be delayed to ensure academic success. However, Canadians emphasize the balance of work and life. While studying, they also have fun or work part-time jobs. So now I value a lot the balance of working and enjoying life. (Jack, IMS)

The participants were also more aware of their own advantages and disadvantages as a Chinese student in a Canadian university. The advantages included Chinese people's

traditional highlighted values such as diligence and modesty. However, some other values of traditional Chinese mentality also hindered the students' smoother integration into Canadian society. For example, there tended to be a lack of contact with Canadians due to the Chinese students' generally quiet and shy social demeanour. Two participants pointed out that Chinese students' differences made them special, but, simultaneously, provided disadvantages such as language problems and cultural limitations. As Francis states:

The advantage is that I am different from Canadians. Difference makes you special. I really like the multiculturalism here in Canada. The disadvantage is that I am still different. Being different, it is hard to integrate into mainstream society. It takes time for us and for them to accept each other. (Francis, INS)

It is worth noting that in this study, one participant commented on the differences between Chinese students who were born in the 70s and the 80s. According to Jane, "those Chinese born in the 70s are more hard working and better disciplined than those born in the 80s." Chinese international students in this study generally belonged to the generation born after the 80s while the immigrant students were older, born in the 70s. Pearl also commented on the different values between the international and immigrant students when it comes to issues of spending and valuing money.

Besides, we (international students) have different life styles and philosophies from those of immigrants. They work hard to save money while we enjoy spending money because we believe that only if we know how to spend money, can we earn more money. For example, my salary is \$2000 per month, so I spend about \$1500 per month. We have a different philosophy of the good life from that of immigrants. (Pearl, INS)

*Outcome E: greater expectations.*

It was a commonly shared understanding by the participants that with more time spent in a Canadian university environment, they expected more from what they experienced. At first, before they began their studies in Canada, the students expected to obtain high marks, a



university degree, and a satisfying job. However, most of them admitted that they had expected more academic or career achievement with the increase of time they spent in Canada. For example, Francis and Mac wanted to further their studies by entering Ph.D. programs after completing their Master's; Cathy wished to make more friends from various cultures and ethnicities; Dan wanted to know more about Canadian society and history; Amie began to emphasize more the merits of process rather than a focus on outcomes. Similarly, Abella comments:

At first I just wanted to get a degree and find a common job, but now I expect more: CA, MBA, and further development in USA, which is endless. (Abella, INS)

To summarize, all these participants were able to achieve the higher education degrees, as they expected. On top of that, they experienced many transformations in terms of personal worldviews and perspectives through pursuing their education in Canada. More significantly, they gradually developed more mature and clear goals for their future lives and career development, with enhanced independent and critical thinking abilities that were fostered by their Canadian higher education.

The participants also pointed out some dissatisfying aspects in their experiences. For example, all the participants shared their worries and anxiety in finding satisfying work after graduation due to their ongoing language and cultural obstacles, as well as low social status. After at least two years of immersion in Canadian universities, the participants were still not pleased with their English or cultural competencies. The international students in this study decided to stay in Canada to further develop their career goals, no matter if the commitment meant a temporary or permanent stay. In addition, they had other obstacles in finding gainful

employment due to their international student status.

*Theme 3: Perceived Contributions to Canadian Universities, Society and China*

The third theme identified from the interview data was students' perceptions of their contributions to Canadian universities and communities, as well as to their Chinese community. When asked about contributions that they perceived they had made to Canadian universities and communities, most participants in this study were very aware of their own ethnicity. They thought that they had brought a new culture to Canadian campuses and society, which would provide Canadians with a good opportunity to be better informed of other cultures. As Francis comments:

I am from a different country so I bring them something special. I help them know more about my country. For example, some of my classmates had biases towards Chinese people because they knew nothing about the development of contemporary China or its people. They still thought Chinese people were poor and not well educated. However, now they feel more comfortable with me and I feel the same too. Hence, it is just something that brings mutual benefit. I think the presence of Chinese students will more or less influence Canadians' thinking patterns. We bring something new and through us, Canadians can see the world. (Francis, INS)

And according to Amie, another international student:

I think by enrolling international students, Canadian universities will understand more about the unique needs of international students. With more international understanding and improvements, the Canadian university will be better prepared and more competitive in North America to attract a greater international student enrolment. (Amie, INS)

Cathy also shares a similar point of view,

First of all, I, as an international student, bring a different culture to this school and society. When I was in the outdoor recreation program, I believed the target of this program was too narrow because it was suitable only to Canadians who had outdoor activity experiences. For students from other cultures, especially from an Asian culture, it was very hard to get adjusted to this program. I discussed this with the Chair of the department. Of course, it was not possible for the department to make changes just because of my comments, but at least they were more aware of minority students' different learning needs. They may realize the importance of having multiple sources of

student recruitment for multiple educational purposes. (Cathy, INS)

Another point that the participants emphasized was their contribution to the economic development of Canadian universities and society, especially those international students who paid high tuition. Abella, who found a job as a financial auditor, comments,

I paid tuition, living expenses, and I am a good citizen, which are all contributions to this city. The decision I made to stay here after graduation is also a kind of contribution because I am well educated and my job is beneficial to Canadian society. (Abella, INS)

Yet, when asked about their perceived contributions to Chinese society, the participants seemed unsure. None of the international students in this study decided to go back to China after graduation. After studying in Canada for some years, they decided that they would prefer to remain in this country, or at the very least, they wanted to obtain some Canadian professional working experiences before they return to China. Despite this change in plans, the participants believed that their transformed attitudes and perspectives would influence their friends, family members, and colleagues in China, with whom they still keep in touch. And they also believed it would help Chinese people learn more about Western countries from their first-hand accounts.

#### *Theme 4: Suggestions for Professors, Future Chinese Students, and University Staff*

The last theme to emerge from analysing the interview data was participants' suggestions for professors, future Chinese international or immigrant students, and the working staff in Canadian universities. One common concern that all the participants emphasized was a caring and empowering academic environment, to be provided by Canadian professors and other university staff. Jane comments, "I hope the Canadian educators will become more responsible for their students. There is an old Chinese saying: to

be a teacher for one day, you are the parent of the student.” The majority of the participants also thought that Canadian professors should take into more account their Chinese students’ language problems and learning habits. For example, Francis states:

Canadian professors should take into account Chinese students’ language abilities because every Chinese student has more or less problems related to their English. They also need to know that Chinese students’ learning habits are quite different from the professors’ expectations of Canadian students. Therefore, Canadian educators should work to motivate Chinese students to become more independent, think more creatively and read more critically, rather than learning by rote reading and regurgitation. (Francis, INS)

Cathy also shared a similar point of view:

All the professors who taught me were very nice. They would listen to my problems patiently and help me out of the problems I identified. However, I hope that they are more concerned with minority students’ distinct needs in class. For example, they may ask students whether they need a slower speech speed, or whether they have any difficulties in understanding what was discussed in class. (Cathy, INS)

And according to Pearl:

Professors shouldn’t doubt Chinese students’ academic capability, nor should they have prejudice towards all the Chinese students only because some previous Chinese students once plagiarized. They should treat Chinese students the same as they do local students. It would also be beneficial for professors to update their knowledge about China and the Chinese people. They should not use their own assumptions as the standards by which to judge Chinese students. (Pearl, INS)

The participants also voiced their desire that Canadian professors actively provide more chances for experiential learning. Rather than only learning theoretical knowledge, these students wanted and needed to practically prepare for their career path. Canadian employers greatly value their employees’ working experiences, thus, practical opportunities are highly valued and desired by Chinese students who have had little social networking or actual work experiences within Canada. These students rely strongly on Canadian professors and universities to provide such transitions to professional work.

For future Chinese students, the first advice disclosed by the majority of the participants was to improve their English as much as possible in order to significantly facilitate their academic performance. David comments that “before they come, Chinese students should improve their English proficiency as much as they can.” Jack also agreed that “the most important thing for future Chinese students to do before they go abroad is their language acquisition and improvement.” Queena agreed by arguing “if they have better English proficiency, they will suffer less in their future endeavours in Canada.”

The participants also suggest that obtaining a degree should not be the sole priority of the students’ Canadian experience. Instead, future students are encouraged to try to learn more about Canadian culture and society for greater long-term benefits. As Queena recommends:

During their university program, they should not only study hard, but learn more about Canadian society, its people and their culture, which will be more meaningful. They shouldn’t only focus on the degree they are going to gain. (Queena, IMS)

Francis commented that Chinese students were generally very shy and quiet, so he suggests that

Chinese students should be more active and out-going. When they come here, they want to be a member of Canadian society, so they should go out to approach local people and to be with them. They have to motivate themselves to learn more about this Western culture. (Francis, INS)

Also, Jack, working in the Student Society, called for Chinese students’ awareness and enthusiasm for the developing of their Chinese community, because it would be a way to have their voices heard on campus and in Canadian society:

Another thing I want to emphasize is their (Chinese students’) awareness of contributing to the local Chinese community. When our Chinese Student Association needed Chinese students’ voluntary help, nobody came out to help. But when we organized some

activities, lots of Chinese students came out to criticize us. Unlike most Chinese students, Canadian students always show their appreciation for any help. I hope Chinese students will be more supportive for school activities because it is a way to show Canadians who we are. (Jack, IMS)

Some participants also suggest that international students should not go abroad at a very young age because they need to be mature enough to be well-disciplined in order to resist any negative temptations. Jane, an international student herself, comments:

I suggest that future Chinese students should not go abroad at a very young age. For example, some rich families send their children abroad when they are only 15, 16, or 17 years old. Children should not be sent abroad until they at least finish high school in China, when they have almost developed their own mature personality and worldview. (Jane, INS)

Abella also supported this opinion by arguing:

If Chinese international students go abroad at a very young age, it is easy for them to be attracted by bad things. Although it is true that only by learning from lessons can youth become more mature, it is also true that they can only achieve more from the new experience when they are old enough and capable enough. (Abella, INS)

When considering important qualities for Canadian university staff who interact with students, the Chinese students were quick to first point out positive qualities such as patience, caring and empathy. Secondly, the Chinese students expect university and support staff to be more concerned about minority students' unique needs, such as language improvement, working opportunities on campus, and cultural events to help minority and Canadian students mix and mingle. For example, Jane suggests that "the international student office can do an entrance survey to learn more about minority students' needs." Jack comments:

One expectation for staff is that they should be more responsible and professional at their job. For example, a secretary working in the front desk may have worked there for tens of years and then assume that students should know a lot of things. But, for students from different cultures who come to a foreign country for the first time, they really don't know anything from bus schedules to locations of washrooms. So the staff should be more sensitive and tolerant. (Jack, IMS)

Queena suggests:

The administrators should organize more activities to help minority students become more integrated into the mainstream culture. As far as I know, the Chinese Student Association often organizes some activities, but they are all about celebrating Chinese festivals, which actually kind of separates Chinese students from mainstream culture. Therefore, we should have more activities to integrate all the students rather than separate some. (Queena, IMS)

Lily comments,

The administrators and working staff have too clear divisions about their responsibilities. It is not wrong to have clear divisions of responsibility, but they should be flexible and at least know some related knowledge. Sometimes, when I went for their help, they would send me to different departments, back and forth. Also, they need to increase their efficiency in each department. (Lily, IMS)

Abella, an international student concludes:

The International Center in my university has done a good job, such as organizing activities like skiing, parties, immigration lectures, renewing documents, parental visits, etc. However, if they provide more chances to inform international students about Canadian laws and regulations, it would be more beneficial for students to know these important rights and obligations. (Abella, INS)

## CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter is organized into four sections. In the first section, I provide an overview of the study. The second section is the interpretation of the research findings by comparing them to literature in this field. The third part is the conclusion of the study, followed by implications according to the participants' comments and concerns. Finally, the last part contains some suggestions for further research.

### Overview of the Study

The consideration of minority students' learning needs is critical as their numbers increase and they are being aggressively recruited by Western universities from the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. Scheyvens, Wild, & Overton (2003) argue that in spite of the increasing visibility of international students in Western universities, "there has not always been adequate acknowledgement or exploration of ways of adapting to the needs of a more diverse student population" (p. 310). This study is of particular importance to providing insights into more effective Canadian university teaching and institutional accommodations of Chinese students' educational needs. This study was framed around two primary research questions: what experiences do Chinese international and immigrant students go through in their later-year study period and how do these experiences impact them after a complete program cycle and immersion in Canadian universities?

The twelve participants in this study all originate from Mainland China and have been immersed in Canadian higher education for at least two years. Six of them are studying on student visas, and the other six are landed immigrants from China.

### Interpretations of the findings



In this study, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the experiences of Chinese students in Canadian higher education institutions. There are certainly other interpretations and conclusions that could be derived from the findings; however, my own perspective as a Chinese immigrant student influences and evolves as I reflect upon these participants' experiences.

### *Academic Shock*

One finding from this study reveals that both Chinese international and immigrant students experience difficulties in adjusting to Canadian higher education pedagogies. Largely different from traditional Chinese teachings that emphasize student obedience and diligence, Canadian university teaching is characterised by an emphasis of active student learning and independent thinking. This pedagogical contrast is challenging enough, but is compounded by difficulties associated with language barriers. While it is unfortunate to know that this finding still occurs, it does confirm the majority of research into the academic experiences of Asian students. For example, Burns (1991) claims that students shifting from Asian culture to Western culture experience “study shock” or a striking difference between the culture of Western universities and the highly structured and disciplined academic culture of Asian countries.

Additionally, there is a significant difference in the methods used to motivate students to strive for higher achievement between Chinese and Canadian instructors. While Chinese instructors are often viewed as transmitters of knowledge, role models, authority figures, and even parents, Western professors act more like facilitators, observers, course designers, guides, and friendly critics (Crotazzi & Jin, 1997; Gu, 2001; Pratt, 1991). All the participants

realized that they could not depend on Canadian professors to push them to work hard. They realized that they had to be more self-reliant and highly self-motivated to achieve greater academic performance. This finding is consistent with Barker's (1990) and Samuelowicz's (1987) conclusions that overseas students' previous learning experiences lead them to have greater work expectations from their supervisors and require more learning direction than local students. Lewins (1990) also finds that the seemingly indifferent attitude of university staff can cause a loss of motivation and even depression among overseas students.

In this study, Chinese students showed strong positive feelings about their experiences in their new Canadian learning institution and living environment. All twelve participants spoke highly of Canadian university teaching that advocates individual participation and independent thinking abilities, but, simultaneously, they emphasized that they needed more time for academic processes and pedagogical coaching than did local Canadian students.

#### *The Time Influence on Academic Stress*

Other published studies have supported a conclusion that the first few months, or the first calendar year of overseas study are to be regarded as the most stressful period for foreign students (Scheyvens, Wild, & Overton, 2003; Ying, 2005). For example, Ying (2005) argues that international students' academic problems "declined significantly during the first calendar year after arrival" (p. 67). However, the findings of this study do not echo the conclusion of gradual linear decline in academic stress. The findings from my study indicate that participants perceived their later-year studies to be more complex, more difficult, and more confusing despite their improved English proficiency and pedagogical immersion in the Canadian university system for more than one year.

Three reasons explain this outcome: (1) the students encountered specialized professional knowledge and more advanced research processes from the second year on; (2) an increased demand for higher levels of independent thinking and self-motivation from their professors; and (3) ongoing anxieties caused by worries related to their impending life decisions, such as where to stay, China or Canada, or how to develop their professional career. Another original finding from this study is that the participants attributed their hardships in adjusting to Western university pedagogies to a lack of exposure and familiarity to Canadian university teaching and learning pedagogies rather than their inability to adjust their own learning styles.

*From Null Culture Shock to Better Integration*

Compared to the students' intense reactions to the academic and pedagogical shocks, none of the participants in this study claimed that they had experienced "culture shock" in their Canadian experiences as predicted by the literature. "Culture shock" is a term that was introduced by Oberg (1960), referring to the "anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 177). The Chinese student-participants in my study clearly had no such feelings of shock due to three reasons: first, with the development of highly advanced technologies, like the internet, Chinese students, whether in China or in Canada, can have convenient access to huge amounts of information about Western countries and their cultures before even arriving at a Canadian university. This helps to reduce the level of unfamiliarity and discomfort when they shift from one culture to the next. This result supports Ying's (2005) statement that Taiwanese students did not experience significant difficulty in cross-cultural living experiences and "could not be said to have

suffered ‘culture shock’” (p. 68). Ying (2005) attributes this phenomenon of not suffering “culture shock” to Taiwan’s own cultural transformation towards modernization and westernization. It becomes apparent from my study that today’s Chinese students do not experience intense feelings over the cultural differences, as those who experienced it in previous decades.

Another factor that contributes to the students’ cross-cultural ease was Canada’s multicultural policies. With the increasing number of Chinese students present in both small and large university settings, the participants commented that they could comparatively and easily find their identity and cultural roots reflected within the student community. In turn, Chinese students in this study tended to turn to other Chinese students for support or friendship instead of their non-Chinese classmates.

A third reason also supports the Chinese students’ perception of not experiencing culture shock from the beginning of their Canadian studies. In the first year, most students spent the majority of their time and energies on their studies. As Lily and Dan confessed, they actually had minimal contact with Canadian culture in their first-year. In other words, the students had not immersed themselves in Canada’s social fabric to really begin to understand it. Hence, the Chinese students’ impressions of Canadian culture gained from China and Chinese sources remained untouched or uncontested after their initial immersion in Canada. What they first perceived as Canadian culture was only a superficial treatment, and as a result, they believe in hindsight that they had minimal difficulty in understanding this Western culture in their first year.

It is worth noting that all twelve participants agree that they began to know more about

Canadian society, Canadians, and really only became more integrated into Canadian culture from the second year on. It was at this stage of their studies that they had more time and energy for social activities and correspondingly, they had also developed a more positive attitude and awareness to learn more about this new Canadian culture. The finding from this study demonstrates that through more contact with the host culture in their later-year stage of studies, most participants forge a more integrated relationship with the host culture. None of the participants viewed Chinese and Canadian cultures as being in conflict with one another; rather, they showed an optimistic attitude of learning good traits and perspectives from both sides. This is consistent with Ogbu and Simons' (1998) claim that Chinese students belong to the voluntary minority group who are more willing to adapt to mainstream society and who view learning the dominant culture and language as a positive addition to their original culture rather than a threat. The participants in this study supported the view that the acquisition of a new culture is a profound learning opportunity.

Another interpretation worth highlighting is that from the second year on, most participants began to step out of their first-year limited social circle. The participants did not lose contact with their Chinese friends, but their socializing began to include more time and contact with Canadian professors, students, or other diverse communities. Most participants were impressed by how much they had learned from socializing with Canadians, especially if it was something that they thought was different or lacking in their own Chinese social skills. This actually supports Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory that emphasizes that learning occurs within a social world and through legitimate peripheral participation such as co-working. By interacting with Canadian communities and culture, Chinese students learned

to negotiate and expand their social skill set to better integrate into Canadian society.

### *Canadian Education's Impacts on Chinese Students*

This study paid particular attention to Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities because it was at this stage that the participants could better view and reflect upon their experiences and distinct needs as students in Canadian universities. The participants' original expectations to study in a Canadian university included obtaining a North American university degree for economic advantages (i.e., a desirable job), a change of life routine and self-improvement, as well as relocating and considering a global citizenship. The findings reveal that all twelve participants in this study expected and were able to graduate with a Bachelor or Master's degree from a Canadian university. They also expected that this degree would be their ticket to obtaining a desirable job in their chosen professional field. However, at this stage of their studies, most of the participants showed uncertainty and worry in the face of the concrete reality of job prospects.

Most participants expressed dissatisfaction with their English language acquisition and improvement during their years of Canadian study; the students stated that it was the main constraint and barrier to securing an economically satisfying job in the Canadian job market. Chow (2001) and Chiswick and Miller (2003) also state that a high level of English proficiency is the greatest necessity for international students to fully participate in the educational, economic, and social domains of Canadian society. Scheyven, Wild and Overton (2003) demonstrate that language related problems remain one of the biggest impediments for international students to achieving success in higher education.

One reason articulated by the participants that this language barrier continues is the

well-developed and increasing Chinese community in both small and big Canadian cities. On the one hand, students have greater access to social services catering to Chinese people's customs and habits. On the other hand, this community support can actually hinder their chances and motivation to practice their English communication. Even Chinese students in smaller cities have realized and taken advantage of the increasing number of Chinese people and services in their communities. All the participants in this study had the same primary advice for future Chinese students: new Chinese students need to become even more highly motivated to improve their English proficiency by making strategic social choices.

To these participants, it seemed that a Canadian higher education credential would only represent a start to receiving greater chances of employment rather than securing employment. Other obstacles confronting Chinese students in obtaining a satisfying job after graduation are culturally related issues such as how to interact with Canadians for more productive outcomes. In addition, a severe lack of social networking was considered to be an impediment not addressed or resolved by a university degree.

Fortunately, upon graduation, most participants perceived that they had obtained more than just professional knowledge for entry into the job market. Most of the participants appreciated the Western approach to learning knowledge more independently, more actively, and more objectively. Through the processes of adapting to Canadian pedagogy, gaining a better understanding of it, and actually being immersed in this teaching and learning, the students believed that their independent and critical thinking abilities were highly enhanced and benefited their future economic and self development. For example, instead of relying entirely on parents for decision making, international students became more independent

thinkers and decision-makers of their own futures. Immigrant students also developed clearer career choices by studying in a Canadian university. Although the participants worried about facing the challenges of finding a well-paying professional job, most of them showed an increase in self-confidence as a result of overcoming past cultural and pedagogical difficulties.

Most participants experienced a transformation of their personal perspectives and worldviews. Immersed in a foreign western culture, they became more aware of their own identity, their traditional values, and ethics. Through this reflection, they tried to examine and absorb good qualities from both cultures. This cross-cultural process actually helped them become more critically reflective, and in turn opened their minds to viewing their experiences as a crucially important learning process. This finding echoes Kim's (2001) argument that "despite, or rather because of, the difficulties crossing cultures entails, people do and must change some of their old ways so as to carry out their daily activities and achieve improved quality of life in the new environment" (p. 21).

#### *Differences between the Two Groups' Experiences*

This study purposefully included one international and one immigrant participant group to draw a more developed view of Chinese students' multiple experiences in multiple Canadian universities. At the start of the study, I expected to find some distinct findings from each group to provide more complete insights into multiple groups of Chinese students' needs for better university accommodation. However, there were few differences that could be identified in the data analysis. One difference worth noting is that during the interviews, the international students appeared to be more confident and optimistic about their future



prospects in Canada; whereas, the immigrant students generally showed less confidence. The differing confidence levels in their future may be related to the age difference between the two groups: immigrant students in this study were in their 30s while the international students were in their 20s. The younger age of international students may have caused them to be more flexible and more optimistic, because they had not experienced failure in job searches, nor did they have responsibilities other than themselves. The immigrant students, on the other hand, were generally experiencing more pressure and stress, especially for those who had family responsibilities to consider. The older immigrant students were clear in their goals to obtain an economically satisfying job so as to settle down with their families and live a successful life in this new country.

Another difference worth noting between the two groups is the generational difference. Because of the “open-door” policy advocated by the Chinese government since the 1980’s, China was marked by more communication and interactions with Western countries. As a result, people born after 1980 are generally more confident, optimistic, economically aggressive, and willing to venture in a new country. In other words, they share more social commonalities with Western youths. Chinese people born before 1980 tend to be more traditional in their social values of modesty, hard work ethic, and social conservatism.

The immigrant students in this study were all skilled workers and financially independent. They mainly depended upon government student loans or their previous savings for the financing of their university studies. The international participants, on the other hand, had their parents to support them, which was not perceived by these students as a big burden for their families, even into their later university year studies. This financial characteristic is

consistent with Lee and Sheared's (2002) argument that "the more wealth and education one has, the smoother the transition into the U.S. cultural milieu ... the less educated and poorer the immigrant, the more likely it is that government intervention will be needed" (p. 29).

Finally, all the international participants had decided to stay in Canada after studying either for attaining some Canadian work experience, or in order to become Canadian permanent residents or citizens. There seemed to be a common assumption by these international students that before deciding to become Canadian residents, they would personally experience Canadian society, its culture, and its people instead of making an immigration decision based upon media information or other immigrants' experiences, like what most immigrants did. Unlike the immigrant students, the international students were supposed to be only sojourners in this host country. China has already lost many advanced professional people due to their immigration to the West. China badly needs the overseas students to return home to put what they have learned from their advanced Western higher education into practice to further the country's economic development. According to a recent Chinese government report (China Daily, 2007), about two-thirds of Chinese who have studied abroad since the 1980s have chosen not to return to reside in China. Altbach and Dais (1999), Hurabielle (1998), and Stromquist (2002) all note the increase in the number of international students who decide to stay in the developed countries after graduation instead of returning to their original developing countries. They are concerned about the serious consequences of this trend as developing countries need the well-educated workforce for technological advancement (As cited by Cudmore, 2005).

### *Differences between the Big and Small University Settings*

Again, there was little difference in students' perceptions and evaluations about the size of the university affecting their later-year experiences. However, students from the small university campuses did enjoy easier access to professors, while students from bigger universities benefited more from the multicultural atmosphere, as well as more extensive on-campus services, such as libraries with bigger collections and more advanced technologies.

### Conclusions

This study explored what Chinese international and immigrant students have experienced in their later-year Canadian university studies and how the Canadian educational experiences have made an impact on them. Altogether four major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (1) perspectives from a later-year point of view; (2) expectations and outcomes; (3) students' perceived contributions to Canadian higher education and society; and lastly, (4) their suggestions for Canadian professors, future Chinese students, and university staff. One significant finding of the students' accounts was that participants' later-year academic experience was even more stressful than the first year. The reasons included the pedagogical contrast between the Asian and Canadian educators; the demand for higher levels of independent thinking abilities and self-motivation to learn; and other career related worries upon graduation. Another original finding from this study was that the participants attributed their hardships in adjusting to Western university pedagogies to a lack of exposure and familiarity to Canadian university teaching and learning pedagogies rather than their inability to adjust their learning.

It is worth noting that all twelve participants agreed that they began to know more about

Canadian society and Canadians, and became more integrated into Canadian culture from the second year on. The finding from this study demonstrates that through more contact with the host culture in their later-year stage of studies, most participants forge a more integrated relationship with the host culture.

I can now conclude that most of the Chinese student-participants in this study achieved more than they expected from their Canadian university education. They not only obtained their desired higher education degree, recognized by North American universities, the majority of the student-participants tended to view their Canadian university experience as a precious opportunity to enhance their independent thinking abilities, confidence, and self-awareness, which helped broaden their future outlooks and better guide their future decisions. All the participants stated that their experiences in the Canadian university transformed their life in a significant way.

#### Implications of the study

Activities on Canadian university campuses are obviously becoming different with the presence of more and more minority students, including both Chinese international and immigrant students. Compared to local Canadian students, the Chinese students rely more on obtaining a qualified Canadian higher education degree to seek economically satisfying jobs after graduation. At the same time, Canadian universities want to take the advantage of bigger economic profit that these students, especially the international students will bring. Walker (1999), Knight (1997), and Burns (2000) acknowledge the shift for recruiting international students from humanitarian motivation to a motivation to boost revenue and export earnings in Canadian higher education. They claim that with the high tuition charged, international

student recruitment “has provided an attractive means of coping with decreases in government funding over the past decades” (as cited by Cudmore, 2005, p. 47). Thus, in order to attract more foreign students for sustaining enrolment in the increasing competitive global market, Canadian universities must not only focus on their local students, but also do their best to listen to and accommodate minority students’ distinct needs.

Given the student-participants’ narratives and comments on their Canadian university learning experiences, expectations, and outcomes, the following implications can be drawn for Canadian universities, educators, administrators, and communities.

#### *Implications for University Administration*

In order to suggest how instructors/professors can adjust their practices, we must first attend to the institutional services in which those practices are embedded. The first thing for Canadian universities to do is to familiarize these Asian students with the learning culture of Canadian higher education, such as the Canadian university pedagogies and the particular requirements for students’ academic performance. This orientation service is equally important for both first-year students and students in their later-year studies, as the participants of this study found their academic experiences during their later-year studies more challenging. As a result, support services provided by the institutions are urgently needed to facilitate these students’ learning.

Given all the participants’ concern about their language barrier for their academic performance, Canadian universities need to provide language assistance not only for the benefit of these minority students, but also for local students as well, because good communication can promote more effective and efficient learning among students. For

example, in order to improve foreign students' English proficiency in a more enjoyable and personalized way, Canadian universities can match local and foreign students into groups of 'study buddies.' This surely will promote more informal and close interaction among the students for faster and more effective English improvement of foreign students. Universities can give credits for Canadian students who willingly participate in such activities in order to attract more help from local students.

As non-native English speakers, Chinese students also find it hard to successfully complete various Canadian academic writing tasks, such as writing reports, essays, or thesis. University writing facilitation centers need to be established on campus for students with writing difficulties as a way to improve their abilities or their offerings need to be as assistive and generous as possible for the ESL student.

University staff can provide more opportunities for intercultural interactions between minority and local students to promote cross-cultural understandings. Again, a 'buddy program' would be very effective to help minority students adapt and know more about their new social environment in a personalized way. Simultaneously, it is also very important to provide local students with more information about minority students' culture so as to build equality and respect between each other instead of identifying/intensifying a gap of perceived power and privilege.

Also, universities have to increase workshops particularly for foreign students who lack enough social networks to facilitate their successful employment. Instead of lecturing on job-searching skills or providing job-related information, these workshops can simulate real working situations in order for these minority students to obtain experiential skills.

Universities need to provide more support to make it easier for professors/instructors to address and accommodate the distinct needs of Asian students too. For example, organize more workshops discussing such topics as Asian students' learning habits, their distinct needs, and how to motivate both local and foreign students for maximum mutual benefits.

*Implications for Professors and/or Instructors*

As Canadian university admission offices recruit increasing numbers of foreign students, it will increasingly be the professors that Chinese students expect to act as gateways to maximize their educational benefits. In other words, Canadian university professors and/or instructors are the people in whom the Chinese students place the highest respect and expectations. Hence, it is crucial for university professors to do their best to understand the Chinese students' situation, to communicate to Admissions and university administration offices of their special needs, and to the best of their abilities, accommodate these Chinese students. For example, Chinese students nurtured by the Chinese educational system tend to believe the purpose of education is to find "the right answers" and to achieve high marks. In stark contrast, Canadian university professors emphasize the students' independent ability to rationalize their intellectual interpretations. In the Canadian system there is actually no one "right answer" expected from most professors, particularly in Arts, Humanities, and Social Studies. This difference between the two educational systems can easily confuse Chinese students. Ridley (2004) suggests that to demystify higher education pedagogy discourses, academic staff should question whether their expectations for foreign students are fair and reasonable, whether dominant ideologies can be changed, and how to build bridges between the dominant academic culture and different cultural perceptions of education that foreign

students bring to campus.

Findings from this study demonstrate that professors should continually examine their own educational frameworks and values in order to be more aware of their own cultural expectations and worldviews which are usually dominated by a middle class white perspective. By becoming more culturally aware of themselves, Canadian professors can be more culturally sensitive to their minority students' distinct needs and learning habits. They can then also become more willing to build pedagogical bridges for minority students to more easily participate in this new learning environment.

Western pedagogies are widely understood as student-centered. Brown (2003) and Henson (2003) both call for teachers to devote more time and practice in a learner-centered approach in order to provide more effective education for the increasingly diverse student population. Brown (2003) argues that teachers should be encouraged and empowered to design and implement curriculum according to students' specific needs. Taking Chinese students' learning habits and their educational frameworks into consideration will afford Canadian professors the opportunity to practice more student-centred teaching at the university level.

According to the Chinese participants' experiences in Canada, the pedagogical style of their individual professors was the most significant factor in their learning and academic achievement. In order to rise to the new challenge of teaching a more mixed student population (foreign and locally educated students alike), professors could become more creative in selecting course materials, style of lecturing, and the methods of instruction. A mixed and flexible use of a wider range of pedagogies would more likely promote



educational success for foreign educated students rather than one preferred pedagogy by the professors. Ridley (2004) provides an example for Canadian university melded instruction by arguing that both instructors' facilitation and instruction are necessary and complementary for newcomers because together they create implicit and explicit learning. Each individual foreign student will benefit from either of them or both of them at different points in their learning. Ridley (2004) thus advocates instructors to be sensitive enough to "respond to individual student needs accordingly" (p. 105).

Canadian education does provide precious opportunities for students from multicultural backgrounds to discuss and examine what they are learning from multicultural perspectives and examples. This international input is beneficial to both local and minority students to give them an opportunity and to become more aware of global perspectives. Canadian universities and professors could take advantage of this new 'glocal' (global and local) student body to offer a richer learning environment for both Canadian and minority students' learning.

Communication and interaction between professors and students is very important not only in class but after class. Compared to the strict and hieratical atmosphere in Chinese classrooms, students in this study preferred the more relaxed and equitable relationship with their professors in Canadian universities. But after class time, the Chinese students found Canadian professors to be more distant and removed than their Chinese counterparts. Chinese teachers' pastoral role requires them to spend as much time as possible for the care and nurturing of each individual student, including extracurricular time. However, in the Canadian universities, instructors' professional roles and responsibilities remain mostly

within the classroom boundaries (Zhang, 2006). Hence, any Canadian professor's attention, enthusiasm, responsibility, and interest in helping their students out of class are preferred and appreciated particularly by Chinese students.

### *Implications for Canadian Society*

Not only do Chinese students benefit from investing in Canadian higher education, the Canadian higher education and community also benefit from the Chinese students' investment. Firstly, Chinese students bring new cultures and perspectives to Canadian campuses and communities, through which they open the window for Canadians to know more about the Asian world. By being there and participating, overseas students help create a multicultural academic atmosphere by enhancing mainstream and minority students' awareness and understanding of other cultures. With a harmonious educational atmosphere, it can then help enhance the reputation and profile of the Canadian universities, which in turn will enhance the competitiveness of Canadian universities in the global competition.

Secondly, Chinese students, especially those who studied as international students, contributed their money for Canadian higher education and also promoted the community's economic development.

Thirdly, most immigrant participants chose further education in Canadian universities because they wanted to change their low-income status and obtain better employment after graduation. Therefore, it can be predicted that it will be less likely for the Chinese students to still rely on social welfare support for living as immigrants in Canada. Instead, they can become high tax payers, which will not only reduce Canadian economic debt, but also promote greater economic status. Moreover, the Chinese immigrants can fulfil more social

responsibilities with their increased income and social status.

Finally, by becoming well educated individuals in Canadian society, the Chinese immigrants can also influence their next generation to prepare well for schooling, which in turn is beneficial for their children's educational development.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

1) Due to the small sample size of this study, the research findings can not be generalized to the whole or a large Chinese student group. A larger sample size involving more Canadian universities would be a valuable extension of this research.

2) As a Chinese immigrant student myself, my personal bias cannot be separated from my analysis and interpretation of the data, although I was aware and worked through the findings from a perspective more closely aligned with the majority of the student-participants. I hope that Canadian researchers will be interested in this topic to continue to discover and analyze global students' distinct needs in Western post-secondary education.

3) This study was conducted when most of the participants were in their last-year of study. At the time of participation, they were at the final stage of completing their last courses and busy seeking satisfying employment. Their perceptions about the impacts of Canadian university education on them are shaped at this point rather than three or four years after graduation when they would be more certain about their career development. Hence, a continued study focusing on long-term perspectives would enrich a more accurate portrayal of Canadian university education's impacts on Chinese students.

4) Future research can also focus on the differences between the Chinese students born before and after the 1980s to determine and identify if there are significantly different historical and social influences on their social character development.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Please describe your reasons and purpose in deciding to study in your Canadian university.
3. Please recall and describe your experiences when you first came into your program in your Canadian university.
  - Academically related
  - Financially related
  - Culturally related
  - Relationship with other students, teachers and administrators
  - Personal concerns
  - Others
4. Please describe your later-year experiences in your Canadian university studies.
  - Academically related
  - Financially related
  - Culturally related
  - Relationship with other students, teachers and administrators
  - Focus for second-year study, third-year study, forth-year study, etc.
  - Special difficulties, troubles, or confusions in the later-year study period
  - Expectations for next step development (career expectations, location of residence...)
  - Personal concerns
  - Others
5. Please describe your greatest changes during your study period in your Canadian university.
  - Motivation (original motivation for Canadian education pursuit and the current motivation)
  - Self-confidence (being more, less or the same confident about your future?)
  - Expectations (original expected gains from Canadian education and the current

expectations)

-Others

6. Please describe support gained from any source during your studies in Canadian universities, especially for later-year experiences.

-Family

-Friends

-University

-Community service

-Others

7. Please describe coping strategies for any problems, difficulties or stress, especially for later-year experiences.

8. Please evaluate your study experiences in the Canadian university.

-Gains and losses

-Judging criteria

9. Please describe any advantages or disadvantages of being a Chinese student in a Canadian university.

10. Please describe your contributions made to the Canadian university or Canadian society, if applicable.

11. Please describe your contributions made to Chinese society, if applicable.

12. Please describe suggestions and recommendations for future Chinese students, Canadian instructors and administrators.

13. Please feel free to add whatever comments or suggestions you may still have.

## Appendix B (for participants from the small university)

### Cover letter

Dear Participant:

As a graduate student enrolled in the Masters of Education program at Lakehead University, I will be conducting a study on Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the nature and purpose of the study and to invite you to participate.

The intent of this study is to examine Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities in order to know from the participants' perspectives what they have experienced and whether they think their investment in Canadian higher education is worthwhile. The study also aims to determine what contributions Chinese students have made through their experiences to Canadian education and society. At the same time, this study aims to provide insights for educators, administrators, and policy makers to make better-informed decisions about teaching, administering and facilitating programs for international and immigrant students.

Data will be gathered from semi-structured interviews. The researcher will interview you face to face for approximately one hour in a private location, comfortable and accessible to you, at your convenience. Some guiding questions will be asked and you have the opportunity to discuss and expand upon your own experiences. The interviews will be audio-recorded for future data transcription and analysis. The researcher will also take some notes for future data analysis. You can choose to use either Chinese or English for the language of communication according to your comfort and preference. Data collected in Chinese will be translated by the researcher and returned to you to check whether the choice of language captures what you wanted to express. All data will be transcribed verbatim and returned to you for an accuracy check. I will also contact you two weeks later for any changes or additional comments.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. All information you provide will remain confidential. A pseudonym on the transcripts will be used to protect your identity. Participation will not involve any potential physiological or psychological risk or benefit. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind. The raw data will be stored for a period of seven years at Lakehead University by my supervisor—Dr. Lisa Korteweg. Upon request, participants can view the findings of the study. A copy of the completed study will be available at the Lakehead University Education Library. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number or email address below.

I really appreciate your cooperation and participation in this study.

Sincerely,  
Shimei Zang

Phone No.: (     )  
Email address:

Appendix C (for participants from the larger universities)

**Cover Letter**

Dear Participant:

As a graduate student enrolled in the Masters of Education program at Lakehead University, I will be conducting a study on Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the nature and purpose of the study and to invite you to participate.

The intent of this study is to examine Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities so as to know from the participants' perspectives what they have really experienced and whether they think their investment in Canadian higher education is worthwhile. The study also aims to determine what contributions Chinese students have made through their experiences to Canadian education and society. At the same time, this study endeavors to provide insights for educators, administrators, and policy makers to make better-informed decisions about teaching, administering and facilitating programs for international and immigrant students.

Data will be gathered from semi-structured interviews. You will be interviewed once individually for approximately 60 minutes. You can choose from either phone interviews or internet interviews, such as using MSN or other video-conference technology. The latter method is preferred if you allow the researcher to view you through web camera. Some guiding questions will be asked and you have the opportunity to discuss and expand upon your own experiences. The interviews will be audio recorded for future data transcription and analysis. The researcher will also take some notes for future data analysis. You can choose to use either Chinese or English for the interview according to your comfort and preference. Data collected in Chinese will be translated by the researcher and returned to you to check whether the choice of language captures what you want to express. All data will be transcribed verbatim and returned to you for accuracy check. I will also contact you two weeks later for any changes or additional comments.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. All information you provide will remain confidential. A pseudonym on the transcripts will be used to protect your identity. Participation will not involve any potential physiological or psychological risk or benefit. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind. The raw data will be stored for a period of seven years at Lakehead University by my supervisor—Dr. Lisa Korteweg. Upon request, participants can view the findings of the study. A copy of the completed study will be available at the Lakehead University Education Library. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number or email address below.

I really appreciate for your cooperation and participation.

Sincerely,  
Shimei Zang

Phone No.: (  
Email address

## Appendix D (for participants from the small university)

**Consent Form**

Dear Participant:

Please read the following information. If you are willing to participate in this study on Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities, please indicate your willingness to do so by signing this consent form. Thank you so much for your participation and cooperation.

I \_\_\_\_\_ am a student at a Canadian university. I have read and understood the cover letter describing the study entitled "Chinese Students' Later-year Experiences in Canadian Universities" by Shimei Zang. I agree to participate in the study and understand that I will be involved in one face-to-face audio-taped interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes. I know that I can choose either Chinese or English for the interviews. If it is done in Chinese, the researcher will translate it and return the translation to me to check its accuracy. I also know that the researcher will send me the transcribed data for accuracy check and any additional change or comment. There will be no potential physiological or psychological harm or benefit for me. I am aware that I will be asked about my current and past experiences at the Canadian university as a Chinese student. The data I provide and my identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be used for me. Also, I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind. I know that the raw data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years by the researcher's supervisor—Dr. Lisa Korteweg. Upon request, I can see the findings of the study. There will also be a copy of the completed study at the Lakehead University Education Library.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E (for participants from the large universities)

**Consent Form**

Dear Participant:

Please read the following information. If you are willing to participate in this study on Chinese students' later-year experiences in Canadian universities, please indicate your willingness to do so by signing this consent form. After you sign it, please mail, fax or scan it back to me at the following address: 141-A Blucher Avenue. Thunder Bay. ON. P7B4Y5. Fax No.:807-346-7771.

Email address: [shimeizang@hotmail.com](mailto:shimeizang@hotmail.com)

Thank you so much for your participation and cooperation.

I \_\_\_\_\_ am a student at a Canadian university. I have read and understood the cover letter describing the study entitled "Chinese Students' Later-year Experiences in Canadian Universities" by Shimei Zang. I agree to participate in the study and understand that I will be involved in one audio-taped interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes. I know that I can choose from phone interview or internet interview, such as using MSN. I also know that I can choose to use either Chinese or English for the interview. If it is done in Chinese, the researcher will translate it and return the translation to me to check its accuracy. I also know that the researcher will send me the transcribed data for accuracy check or any additional change or comment. There will be no potential physical harm or benefit for me. I am aware that I will be asked about my current and past experiences in the Canadian university as a Chinese student. The data I provide and my identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be used for me. Also, I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind. I know that the raw data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years by the researcher's supervisor—Dr. Lisa Korteweg. Upon request, I can view the findings of the study. There will also be a copy of the completed study at the Lakehead University Education Library.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date